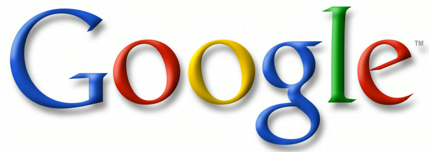

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SONS OF BELIAL

BY

WILLIAM WESTALL

Author of "The Phantom City," "The Old Factory," "A Fair Crusader," "Larry Lohengrin," "Two Pinches of Snuff," etc.

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SONS OF BELIAL.

CHAPTER I.

MATTHEW ARMSTRONG, the father of the family and the founder of its fortunes, was a journeyman molder at Whitebrook. His two elder sons, Mark and Luke, were brought up to the same trade. There were also two lasses. John was the youngest of the brood, a circumstance which, though he had frequent occasion to deplore it, proved of great advantage to him in the struggle for life. So true is it that good things often come to us in guise so questionable that we regard them rather as burdens than as blessings.

While the father and Mark and Luke were at the foundry, the mother managed a small ale house in Back Lane, known as The Sons of Harmony. John's waking hours were divided between playing marbles in the streets, which generally meant playing truant, and going to a school kept by a retired bookkeeper, who took pupils at threepence a week, and spent the greater part of his earnings in drink.

The Armstrongs were doing well, and even saving money, when a stroke of bad luck befell them. The three breadwinners were thrown out of work by the failure of their employer, and the commercial depression which

then prevailed rendered it impossible for them to get work elsewhere, try as they might.

The prospects of the family at this time were anything but bright. Even at the best they could not have lived on the profits of the ale business, and the demand for malt liquor was exceedingly slack, owing also to the bad times. Moreover, everybody who did drink wanted tick, —the inside of the kitchen door was white with "chalks," —and the brewer's collector wanted cash. Which, as the head of the family aptly remarked, was like burning the candle at both ends.

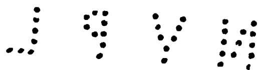
Said Matthew to his lads one night, as they sat despondent round the fire, lights being allowed only on the rare occasions when paying customers were to the fore, "If we don't make a move o' some sort afore our bit o' brass is done we shall have to clem—or go th' workhouse, and I'd rayther dee."

"What sort of a move can we make?" asked Luke. "I've walked a matter of fifty miles this week after a job, and if I had walked five hundred I don't think I should ha' getten one."

"Well, I have a bit of a notion—but there's no use talking; if owt comes on't thou'll hear soon enough."

Neither Luke nor the others pried further. They doubted whether the father's "bit of a notion" was likely to help them in their need; also, they knew him for a man of few words and quick resolves, and that he would not be more explicit even though they should entreat him.

But the incident was not forgotten, and a few nights afterward, when they were again sitting round the fire in semi-darkness and low spirits, Luke asked, not without a touch of sarcasm in voice and manner: "What about that bit of a notion of yours, father?"



"It's more than a bit of a notion, and I've done it," said Matthew.

"Done what, father?"

"Sold th' incoming of th' Harmony and taken th' Canal Foundry."

A live shell or a dead sweep falling on the hearthstone would not have created a livelier sensation than this announcement did. A moment's intense silence was followed by a clamor of excited voices.

"Hast thou gone mad, Matt, or art tha lying?" asked the wife of his bosom, a lady with an energetic temperament and a sharp tongue.

"Nayther, and if you'll nobbut howd your noise I'll tell you all about it."

Whereupon the clamor hushed and the head of the family explained that he had sold the ale business—stock, chalks, good will, and part of the furniture—because it was bringing in nowt but bad debts, and taken the foundry because it would provide him and the lads with work. It was but a small concern, and as the previous tenant's plant had been seized for rent and was included in the take, all they needed for a start was coal, coke, and sand. Furthermore, the landlord was so pleased to get a tenant on any terms that he had agreed to accept a merely nominal rent at the outset, and afterward—if the lessee so desired—to grant a long lease at a low figure.

"And there's a little house belonging to th' foundry as 'll just suit us, and no rent to pay," added Matthew, by way of a clincher.

"That's all very fine, father, but seeing as every foundry in th' place is either stopped altogether or on short time, how are you going to get work?" asked Mark.

"By doing it cheap and doing it well. We want nowt but a wage at th' start, a less wage than we should take from a mayster; and as our living will depend on our doing good work we shall do it better than any shop i' Whitebrook."

"There's summat i' that. But how if we are ruined?" queried Mrs. Armstrong, still doubtful.

"Better be ruined working than lying down, and there's nowt so sure as we shall be ruined if we don't bestir ourselves, and wi' what we have laid by, and th' price o' th' incoming we can carry on and pay our way for a month or two. Anyhow, th' die's cast. I shall have th' keys to-morrow; and you lads mun set agate straightening things up. There's a lot to be done. Jack too. He can use a hand brush and run errands. If he wants any more schooling, let him go to a neet school. While you are making ready I'll go on th' hunt, and when I've gotten orders enou' for a blow we'll buy pigs, scraps, and coke. No use getting 'em afore they're needed. There's as much sand on th' ground as 'll serve for a start."

No further objection was urged. The die was cast, and when Matt had made up his mind even his strong-willed wife had to hold her noise.

The hunt for orders succeeded "better than like." Matt's rugged face and blunt manner created a favorable impression from their very novelty, and among a busy, pushing community like that of Whitebrook sympathy is never refused to enterprise and audacity.

"Times are hard, and I'll take times prices," he would say. "I only want just as much profit as 'll keep th' childer i' porridge, and if I don't give you good work you shall have it for nowt. I cannot say fairer than that."

An appeal so different from that of the ordinary suppliant for business seldom failed to secure a trial order, and a week after they took the foundry the Armstrongs had their fir t "blow."

The result was satisfactory; further orders followed. Before long Belial and his sons, as folk called them (for a reason which will appear presently), had their hands full, and more business than their scanty capital could cope with. It took all their money to buy materials; they lived for weeks on porridge and red herrings, and more than once three watches and several other odds and ends had to make a temporary sojourn at a neighboring pawnship. However, they won through it all, and by the end of the year were in smoother water, and Matt had a banking account, with a small balance on the right side. By the end of the second year his business had grown so much that he found it necessary to add to his plant and take on more hands; his neighbors began to regard him as a rising man, tradesmen offered him credit, and his bankers allowed him an overdraft. Nevertheless, he and his sons abated none of their tireless industry, working as hard and living as joylessly as though they were serving a term of penal servitude. They rose at five, seldom left the shop before eight, and on blowing and other busy days stayed there until ten, occasionally later. On Sundays they made up their arrears of sleep, rising only just in time for a one o'clock dinner. Later on, if it were fine, they would take a walk, after looking in at the foundry. When it rained they played dominoes.

Jack read, if he could get a book, or took the clock to pieces and put it together again, an amusement in which he found great delight.

The only extravagance in which the head of the family

indulged was an occasional Saturday night's fuddle on principle. Though it made him ill, he thought it did him good.

John's lot was the hardest of all. His big brothers teased him unmercifully. He was sent hither and thither, put to this job and that, and acted generally as jack of all trades and "odd lad." He had been far happier when his father was a common workman, and it never seemed to occur to Matt that his youngest son needed any other recreation than "a bit of a holiday" when they were slack, though to be sure he did let him lie in bed till breakfast time on the mornings after he had been to the night school. But in the end the work proved too much for his strength; bits of iron and sand got into his lungs, and his chest was racked with a violent cough. His mother became alarmed, and his father, who, despite his hardness and devotion to business, was not devoid of feeling, took him to Dr. Chorley, a local practitioner of repute, noted for his sound sense and plain speaking.

After examining the patient he took the father aside, and inquired whether he wanted his son to live or die.

"To live, of course. What makes you ask such a question?" demanded Matt, in unfeigned surprise.

"Because you have been acting as if you wanted to kill him, and I'm not quite sure that you haven't succeeded. The only way of saving his life is to let him spend the next two or three years in a milder climate."

"Is it as bad as that? Where mun he go?" asked Matt, now greatly concerned.

"Has he been to school?"

"Not much."

"I thought so. A nice father you are, killing your son instead of educating him. The sooner you reverse the

process the better. I can put you in the way of doing so. There is a grammar school in Surrey, where the air is pure and bracing and the climate mild, kept by a man about whom I know something, who will bestow as much care on your boy's health and education as if he were his own lad. You must send him there, Mr. Armstrong."

"Ay! But about how much will it cost, thinken you?" asked Matt dubiously.

The doctor, a man of tall stature and imposing presence, drew himself up to his full height.

"What! you weigh cost against your son's life!" he exclaimed indignantly. "A life endangered by your own heedlessness and greed. I wash my hands of you. Get out of my house, sir!" pointing to the door.

Matt, who had no wish to quarrel with his doctor, and felt that the reproach was not altogether undeserved, gave the soft answer which turneth away wrath.

"Don't get into a passion, doctor. I didn't mean no offense," quoth he quietly. "I'm getting on middling, it's true; but I'm not made o' brass, and I've heard say as some o' them boarding-schools is terrible expensive. I only just want to know, you know, as a matter of business, summat about th' cost. I want th' lad to get weel, and mean to follow your advice as far as I can afford."

"You may be sure I should not recommend an expensive school to you, Mr. Armstrong," returned the doctor rather scornfully, at the same time dropping his outstretched arm and resuming his chair. "I shall ask Mr. Livermore to let you know his terms, and then you will be able to make up your mind. But pray remember that on your decision depends this poor boy's life."

Whereupon Matthew went his way, and in a few days heard that Mr. Livermore's terms for boarders were fif-

teen pounds a quarter, which, as he rightly remarked, "is a matter of sixty pounds a year, and ten to one there'll be extras." It was a "sight o' brass," but partly out of real concern for Jack, partly out of fear that if he died Doctor Chorley would say that the lad's death lay at his father's door, Matt decided to let him go to Ashcombe Grammar School for a twelvemonth, and then "they would see." In any case, railways being in their infancy, Surrey a long way off, and travelling expensive, he must remain at school until he should leave it for good.

As Matt, who was not without "proper pride," had decided that "th' lad shouldn't go shabby," Jack got an ample outfit, and much good advice. His father bade him to be a good lad, and "larn aw as he could." His mother told him "to be sure and behave nicely," though without defining what she meant thereby. Billy Buss (otherwise "Owd Omnibus"), his father's successor at the Sons of Harmony, was more precise, and, having once on a time been a gentleman's groom, was supposed to be well acquainted with the uses of polite society.

"Thou'll ha' to mind what thou art doing," quoth he gravely. "Thou'll want a pocket handkercher for one thing, and not for show, nayther; and they're finnicking about their eating and drinking, quality folks is. They are quality where thou're going, aren't they?"

John said that Dr. Chorley had told his father that Mr. Livermore was a scholar and a gentleman.

"Well, I reckon that comes to th' same thing. Thou will n't ha' to gnaw thy bones; thou mun just scrape th' flesh off wi' thy knife, and put it i' thy mouth wi' thy fork, never wi' thy knife. That isn't manners, no moor than it's manners to shed thy tay into thy saucer. Thou'll have to sup it out of thy cup."

"What if it's scalding hot?" demanded Jack in dismay.

"If it's hot thou'll ha' to wait till it cools; and what's moor, thou munnot cool thy tay wi' blowing into 't, as thou does thy porridge. Naa, mind what I've tow'd tha. It's no nonsense, it's ayther what I've seen mysel' or heard fro' th' sarvants when I lived wi' Mr. Carstairs at Dyke Nook, and them upper sarvants knows just as much about manners as their maysters."

Fortified with this counsel and fairly supplied with pocket money, John Armstrong took leave of "their folk" and set out for London, in charge of Mr. Church, a pig iron merchant, with whom his father had dealings, nothing loath, for he was heartily tired of Whitebrook and slavery.

Now, some time before these things happened it came to pass that a fiery teetotal orator swooped down on Whitebrook and electrified the town by a series of remarkable lectures, delivered with great energy and power. Yet though Mr. Rodgrind, the gentleman in question, converted some of his hearers, he was scorned by others, for the Whitebrookers were ever distinguished by a vein of caustic wit, and blessed with a keen sense of the ridiculous. In one of his discourses he fell foul on the Armstrongs.

"As I passed along your streets yesterday," said he, "I observed a little shabby-looking beer house bearing the sign of 'Sons of Harmony.' Rather, I thought, 'Sons of Belial,' for, my friends, the people who frequent, as well as the people who own these poison shops, these haunts of vice and abodes of dissipation, are hastening to a terrible doom, and unless they take warning in time will perish miserably."

The orator took his departure, and was soon forgotten, but he had enriched the vocabulary of Whitebrook with a new nickname. "Sons of Harmony" was still the sign of the "poison shop," but its customers, and pretty nearly everybody else, called it "Sons of Belial," and the popular imagination identified Matt with the demon, and his lads with the "sons." The name followed them to the foundry, which became at once Belial's Foundry, and one of the workmen asked where he wrought would almost invariably answer, "At owd Belial's." On the meaning of the epithet being explained to Matt he looked rather glum, then said, laughing, that so long as they emptied his beer—and paid for it—they could ca' him what they liked.

But his toleration and good humor had their limits, and when a customer addressed Mrs. Armstrong as "Mrs. Belial," Matt first knocked the fellow down and then kicked him into the street.

CHAPTER II.

Ashcombe was a picturesque, old-fashioned village on the slope of a hill looking south. The grammar school, a quaint Elizabethan edifice, hoar with age and green with ivy, stood on the edge of the green, between the church, which dated from the thirteenth century, and the timber-built inn, which had possessed a license before the dissolution of the monasteries. When John Armstrong reached his destination one August evening, just as the shadows were deepening and the rooks settling noisily in the rectory elms, while wains, laden with golden grain, wended slowly homeward, the sleek horses led by a heavy-footed wagoner, it seemed to the lad as though he had come into another world. And nothing could well present a sharper contrast to his native Whitebrook, with its gloomy foundries and workshops, tall chimneys, gaunt factories, grimy houses and gloomy streets, filled as they would be at that hour with a crowd of rough-tongued, swart-visaged men in soiled garments, and pale chattering women with shawled heads and clogged feet, rattling like iron hail on the flagged footpaths.

And the two worlds, though in the same little island, were as wide apart in thoughts, habit, and ideas as though oceans rolled between them.

Mr. Livermore lived in a large house near the school—not a great mansion by any means, yet such a dwelling as John Armstrong had never before put his head into. A boy in buttons answered his knock, and while the odd

man took possession of his luggage, led him across a hall, adorned with pictures, into the drawing room, which albeit nothing extraordinary as touching size, and rather plainly furnished, appeared to the raw Lancashire youth wondrous fine.

"You are to sit down and wait till Mr. Livermore comes to you," said buttons curtly, and then withdrew.

John sat down and admired the room and its contents, especially the big gilt framed mirror over the mantelpiece; then looked into the garden, which was adorned with clipped yews and pretty flower beds. Wearying after a while of these distractions, he took up a book, one of several that lay on the table.

"'Works of William Shakspere.' Who is he, I wonder?" murmured John. It was his first acquaintance with the immortal bard, whose mere name he had never so much as heard. He turned over the leaves, and was pouring over the pictures when, hearing somebody at the door, he laid the book nervously down and stood at attention, thinking this the right attitude in which to receive Mr. Livermore. But instead of the master there entered a miss, a girl of twelve or thirteen years old, with hair like yellow silk falling on her shoulders, large dark eyes, peach-like cheeks, an aspiring nose, and a pert manner.

"You are to have tea with us in the dining room. The boys' supper is not till eight, and Mr. Livermore thinks you will be hungry after your long journey. He is engaged with somebody in the study; that is why you were shown into the drawing room. New boys are generally shown into the study. Mr. Livermore will see you afterward. He said I might keep you company till the tea bell rings; it will ring in a few minutes. What is your name, and where do you come from?"

"John Armstrong; fro' Whitebrook, i' Lancashire."

"Mine is Mary Perkins, but everybody calls me Polly. I am Mr. Livermore's niece. They were talking about you the other day. My uncle had a letter from a doctor."

"Doctor Chorley," suggested Jack.

"Yes, that's the name. They were at college together, I think. My uncle said he expected to find you rather a rough diamond, and that Whitebrook is a rough place. How did you come?"

"As far as London, with a man in the iron trade, as our folks does business with; part of the way by coach, part by rail. Then from London to Guildford by coach, and I got 'ere fro' there in a one 'orse shay."

"How strangely you talk! and you drop your h's dreadfully. You said 'ere and 'orse."

Poor John looked puzzled. He had meant to say 'ere and 'orse, for as touching the use and misuse of the aspirate his mind was, as yet, a blank.

"Yes, you did," went on Miss Perkins, "and you'll get chaffed awfully, if you don't mind, and Mr. Quilman, the second assistant master, will make you write h's all over your slate and aspirate them out. But Miss Frost is the one for h's."

"Miss Frost?" queried John.

"The governess. She makes you learn: ''Twas whispered in heaven, 'twas muttered in hell, an echo caught softly the sound as it fell,' and if you don't aspirate clearly and distinctly she makes you repeat fifty times rapidly, 'The haughty horse reared high his hirsute head.' You try."

John tried and failed ignominiously: "The haughty 'orse——"

"That won't do," laughed Polly. "Horse! Can't you say 'Haughty horse'?"

The next time John did better. He began to have a glimmering of the important part played by the letter "h" in the English language.

"You are improving," observed his monitress condescendingly; "only take care you don't aspirate when you ought not. That is worse than not aspirating at all. Do you know the use of the globes?"

"No," answered John. He might have added, if he had not been reluctant to confess his ignorance, that he did not know what a globe was.

"I say, how dreadfully your education must have been neglected. I like learning the use of the globes. When Miss Frost is away it's great fun whirling them round and seeing where they stop. But that is the tea bell. Come along, my uncle likes everybody to be there when he says grace."

She set off, and he followed. When they reached the door Miss Perkins stopped short and said, "Well!" John stopped also, and answered with an interrogative stare. Something was evidently expected of him, but what, he had no idea.

"Open the door!" quoth she. "A gentleman always opens the door for a lady."

The Lancashire lad blushed, did as he was bidden, and followed humbly in her wake. Though not naturally shy he entered the dining room with a good deal of trepidation. He had never been among "fine folk" before, and was afraid of committing some *gaucherie*, or, as he said to himself, "putting his foot in it," and Miss Perkins' admonitions had aggravated his misgivings.

Albeit not a tall man, Mr. Livermore held his head high, and his figure was as well adapted for displaying his ample white waistcoat as his mouth was for the display of his brilliantly white teeth. The head master had regular features and a good profile, but, as Jack thought, rather a hard face. Nevertheless, he smiled blandly on the new boy, with whom he shook hands and hoped he had had a pleasant journey. Jack next shook hands with Mrs. Livermore, a pleasant, though rather anxious-looking, lady, with long ringlets, a many-flounced gown, and much-ringed fingers.

There were two other ladies, two girls about the same age as Polly Perkins, and a small boy, who did not behave as a schoolmaster's son should.

Shortly after Mr. Livermore had said grace there entered a dapper little gentleman, who, as he took his place at the table, apologized for his want of punctuality on the ground of having been "engaged with the boys." Jack fell in love with this gentleman, whom he heard the others address as "Mr. Noble," at first sight. He had a round face, a dimpled chin, beautiful brown eyes, and a sympathetic silvery voice, and he smiled so pleasantly and spoke so kindly withal that it was impossible to help liking him. Indeed, Mr. Noble seemed a general favorite.

"John Armstrong?" he said, glancing at the newcomer.

"Yes, sir," responded Jack.

"You have had an arduous journey. How long were you on the way?"

"One day to Birmingham, another to London, another here."

"That makes three days. Well, I hope we shall be

good friends. We are likely to see a good deal of each other."

"I am sure we shall be good friends, sir," answered Jack impulsively.

"We shall see. I am always a good friend to good boys."

From which Jack aptly concluded that though Mr. Noble might be kind, he was not soft, and that it depended entirely on himself whether they were good friends or not.

At the conclusion of the meal Mr. Livermore looked at his watch, then at the bronze clock on the mantlepiece.

"I declare, that clock is wrong again!" he observed testily.

"It is stopped," said his wife. "It is always stopping. I think it wants taking to pieces and cleaning. We must have the clockmaker from Guildford, or send it to him."

"There's no need to do that. I'll clean it fast enough, if they'll let me," whispered John to his neighbor Polly.

"Never whisper. It is dreadfully rude," she whispered back. Then aloud, "Uncle, the new boy says he can mend the clock."

"Indeed, can you really, Armstrong? I had no idea you were so clever," said Mr. Livermore in a bantering tone.

"It isn't much to mend a clock," returned Jack modestly. "You've only to take th' works to pieces, clean and oil 'em, and then fit 'em up again, and I've a twothry tools i' my box."

"A twothry tools! What is a twothry tools?"

"He means a few—two or three," explained Mr. Noble, "and I think you may trust him with the clock, sir. He has had a mechanical training."

"Very well. You shall try your hand at it to-morrow,

Armstrong; and now if you will come with me into the library we will decide into what class you are to be put. Perhaps you will come, too, Mr. Noble."

So the two masters, followed by the new boy, looking very glum, and feeling not very happy, went into the library, which served also as Mr. Livermore's study. But both were kind to him, and Mr. Noble endeavored, not unsuccessfully, to put the lad at his ease.

"You have been at school, of course?" began the head master.

"Yes, sir, a day school and a night school."

"What did you learn at the day school?"

"Reading, writing, and ciphering."

"The three R's, in fact. Any Latin?"

As Jack had not the least idea what Latin was he felt safe in saying "no."

"Dear, dear, that is very sad. Totally ignorant of Latin," observed Mr. Livermore, who was great at Latin, and the author of a Latin grammar which, though he deemed it the best extant, had not succeeded in making its way into any school but his own. "Dr. Chorley was right in saying your education had been neglected. Any history?"

Poor Jack, painfully conscious of his ignorance, shook his head.

"Surely you know something of the history of England? Who were the two great men that invaded this country; the one before the Christian era, the other A. D. 1066?"

Again Jack shook his head, and Mr. Livermore raised his eyebrows in mute surprise and glanced significantly at his colleague, as much as to say "Did you ever see the like?"

"But perhaps—can it be possible that you don't know what A. D. means?"

"Year of our Lord, sir," replied Jack briskly, and delighted to think that here, at least, was a question he could answer.

"Right! and B. C.?"

Jack's countenance fell again. "B.C." was beyond him.

"B. C.," repeated the master emphatically. "Do the letters recall no memory? Are they not associated in your mind with something, something very familiar? Think!"

Jack did think ;- thought till his head went round, and all at once, when he was about to confess his ignorance, a billiant idea occurred to him, and he exclaimed eagerly:

"Bacon collops."

Mr. Livermore reddened with rage. He thought Armstrong was making fun of him.

"No, sir. Before Christ!" he roared. "I do believe——" and then perceiving from his pupil's face that he was innocent of offense, stopped short, and neither Jack nor Mr. Noble (who was nearly exploding with suppressed laughter) had the advantage of learning what the head master believed as to the matter in question.

"Your ignorance is simply phenomenal. I never met with such a case in my life. Lancashire must be benighted past belief. A boy of your age, nearly fourteen years old, to think that B. C. signifies bacon collops! Unless it were sheer ignorance it would be rank blasphemy. You will have to begin at the bottom, there is nothing else for it. You must go into the sixth class with the little boys."

Jack's eyes filled with tears.

"I am very sorry, sir," quoth he humbly. "But I have not had much chance of learning. It was not a

good school I went to, and when my father started th' foundry he took me away, and I have had to work hard ever since,—that's three years,—oft fro' six o'clock in th' morning till eight at night, and then gone to bed with aching bones."

"Poor boy; it's no fault of yours. Don't be discouraged," said Mr. Noble sympathetically. "You have told us what you learned at the day school. What did you learn at the night school?"

"A bit of writing in a copy book, but mostly sums, and such like."

"Hum! Do you happen to know how many yards there are in a mile?"

"Yes, sir; seventeen hundred and sixty."

"And in ten miles?"

"Seventeen thousand, six hundred," answered Jack promptly.

"In fifty miles?"

Again the lad answered quickly and correctly, as also several other and more difficult questions, to the two masters' evident surprise.

"You are well up in mental arithmetic, whatever else you may be ignorant of," observed Mr. Noble. "How far have you gone in arithmetic?"

"All through it twice, sir, and I've done a bit of geometry and algebra."

Mr. Livermore took a copy of Euclid from a bookcase and asked Jack whether he could do a proposition which he began to read.

"That's th' fifth i' th' first book," interrupted Jack.

"Yes; the Asses' Bridge. You can demonstrate it? There are pencils and paper on the table."

Jack took a sheet of paper, drew the figure with a firm

hand, and demonstrated the proposition without either hesitation or mistake, and afterward did several others selected by the head master with equal facility and precision.

"You must have been well taught," remarked Mr. Noble. "Who was your teacher?"

"His gradely name is Pickup, but folk mostly call him 'Long-Nosed Ben.' He's very clever, and they say if he was only steady he could be owt as he liked."

"A clever ne'er-do-weel, and self-taught genius, I suppose. But say 'proper,' not 'gradely,' and 'anything,' not 'owt,' Armstrong. What do you think now, Mr. Livermore?"

"We shall have to consider. You can take a turn in the garden, Armstrong. It's fine and moonlight. You'll find Polly Perkins there, whom you know, and my daughters."

Jack left the library reluctantly. He was in low spirits, and instead of joining the young ladies paced to and fro pensive and downcast. But presently Polly spied him.

"So you have been put to the question?" says she. "Well, I hope you feel none the worse for it. What class are you to be in?"

The answer was given by Mr. Noble, who just then came within earshot.

"The first, as touching mathematics; and, I think, first in the class," he said. "But as he is rather backward in some things we are going to make a special pupil of him. Your uncle will conduct him through the mazes of his Latin Grammar; I shall take him in other subjects, and by the end of next half-year I hope he will be qualified for one of the higher classes."

"So I am not to be put with the little boys?" exclaimed Jack joyfully.

"No; in mathematics you rank with the oldsters. Armstrong does long sums in his head, Polly. Can you tell me how many times sixty goes in seven times twenty-four. Quick now!"

"Oh, my! I should need a slate and an hour all to myself, and then I don't think the answer would come right."

"Tell her, Armstrong."

Armstrong told her.

"Oh, you clever boy! To do sums and mend clocks in your head," cried Polly, and off she ran to tell her cousins and Miss Frost what a prodigy had come to Ashcombe.

"I am going to the boys, now. It is supper time and I must be there to keep order," observed Mr. Noble. "You will come into prayers with the others, and to-morrow we must make a study plan."

"Prayers? Is there a prayer-meeting, then?"

"Not exactly. We have morning and evening prayers —family worship, you know."

"Family worship?" echoed Jack, in a tone which implied that he did not know.

"Yes; I have not time to explain. You will see."

Whereupon the senior assistant master went away marveling. "Here is a lad who has arithmetic and Euclid at his fingers ends, yet never heard either of Julius Cæsar or family worship! Good Heavens, what a bringing up!"

CHAPTER III.

ASHCOMBE GRAMMAR SCHOOL had a small endowment and some eighty scholars, about half of whom came a distance and lodged with Mr. Livermore and one of the assistant masters, who lived in the village. Mr. Noble, who, as a bachelor, could not keep a "house," lived with Mr. Livermore and helped him to look after his boarders, fortunately for John Armstrong. He was also fortunate in being at an age when, according to the rules, he was entitled to a separate bedroom.

Jack's school life at the outset was not happy. Everything was so strange and unaccustomed, so different from Whitebrook that he felt out of his element. His schoolfellows gibed at his uncouth ways and rugged accent ; and when, in demonstrating a proposition on the blackboard he mispronounced a word or misplaced the aspirate a titter would go round the class. The lads whom he surpassed in mathematics, and he surpassed them all, were jealous of him, played him tricks, and called him "Lanky Armstrong," in allusion as well at his native county as to his somewhat ungainly figure.

All this Mr. Noble marked, and gave his *protégé* sage counsel.

"I see how it is," said he ; "they are worrying you. Some lads are capable of neither sympathy nor pity, and there are too many of that sort in the house. You must assert yourself, Armstrong. I don't admire fighting in

the abstract any more than I admire flogging, but both are sometimes necessary. You must thrash or try to thrash one of your tormentors, and even though you should fail you will stop their tricks and win their respect, always provided, of course, that you show a bold spirit. Did you ever——"

"I have foughten a twothry battles wi' other lads, if that's what you mean. They're great feyters i' Whitebrook."

"'Fought,' not 'foughten,' and 'fighters,' not 'feyters.' Armstrong. But no kicking is allowed in this part of the world, remember."

"It's all neyves, then?"

"Yes, but we say 'fists.' You are getting stronger, have a long reach and muscular arms. With a little practice you ought to be able to hold your own with any of them, except, perhaps, Farley and Clement. Come to my room, and we'll have a bout with the gloves and see how you shape."

Jack had never had boxing gloves on before; but as he had been used to hard work he was limber and could hit out straight, not with the round motion of rigid muscles and unaccustomed arms, and after a few more lessons, which Mr. Noble kindly gave him, felt that, the need arising, he could fight a fair fight, and that fists, either for attack or defense, were before feet.

The need came sooner than he expected. The cock of the school was Farley, in age two years older, in height four inches taller, than Armstrong, whom he had often covertly insulted and egged on the others to insult, and as Jack did not retaliate he thought the Lancashire lad had no pluck, and might be flouted with impunity.

There was a cricket field behind the house, and one

Saturday afternoon a good-natured lad, with whom Jack had struck up a friendship, proposed that he should be allowed to play.

"No, we don't want muffs," said Farley, with a sneer. "Armstrong can neither play cricket nor speak English. But what can you expect from a fellow whose father keeps a rag shop, and goes about with a wheelbarrow, collecting bones and old iron?"

"You are a liar," exclaimed Jack hotly.

"I'm a liar, am I? Take that, you low-born Lanky," returned Farley, giving Jack a slap in the face, to which Jack replied with a blow which sent Farley sprawling

Whereupon great excitement and a general hub-bub. Farley sprang to his feet breathing fire and slaughter, and went for Jack; but the others interposed, saying that if they were going to fight they should fight fair, and according to rule. Farley, still furious, protested that Armstrong must either accept battle or a thrashing. Jack electing for battle, a ring was formed, backers and an umpire appointed, and the two combatants stripped for the fight.

"Farley is bigger than you and a good boxer," whispered Armstrong's second. "He'll try to rush you. Act on the defensive, and don't strike out until he shows signs of distress."

Excellent advice, which Jack, conscious of his inferiority in height and weight, faithfully followed. Farley, who was active on his pins, danced all round him, making feints and looking for an opening. Jack faced his man boldly yet warily, successfully stopping several well-delivered strokes, yet giving none back, and was thinking it was about time he did when his foot slipped on the

grass, himself at the same time getting a buffet on the chin which laid him low.

"A piece of ill luck, that," said his second as he helped him to his feet. "But you are none the worse. Keep cool and wear him out; that is your only chance; and when he begins to flag, strike home."

The second round lasted longer than the first. Jack went on as before, receiving and countering several blows, and wearying his impetuous antagonist with Fabian tactics. After a while Farley's breath grew shorter, he became less active and alert, and his vigilance relaxed; a voice behind Jack cried "Now!" He dodged a blow, then struck out with a will, and his foe went down.

Farley rose, wild with rage, and when time was called endeavored to overcome Armstrong by sheer strength, raining blows on him like hail, which so exasperated Jack that he forgot caution and his mentor's warnings, and, renouncing defensive tactics, gave blow for blow without regard for either science or art. Farley tried to throw him. They closed and fell on the grass, Farley above, Jack below, amid the excited cries and shouts of the onlookers.

Suddenly the din ceased, and "Nix!" was the cry, or rather the whisper. The head master had approached unperceived.

"What is all this about?" he asked gravely, as the combatants picked themselves up, their shirts blood-stained and torn, their faces the color of raw beefsteaks.

In their play hours Mr. Livermore left his boys pretty much to themselves, and thought it made for manliness, and encouraged pluck and endurance, to let them fight their battles out, always provided the fighting was fair

and the odds were not too great. But his wife thought otherwise. She hated fighting. Even to hear of it upset her nerves, and when a small boy ran into the garden and told that Farley and Armstrong were boxing each other's faces, she besought her husband to stop it at once.

"Farley will hurt him dreadfully, I am sure he will," said she. "Armstrong is such a quiet boy, too, and not strong, and you promised Dr. Chorley to take particular care of his health."

This was undeniable, so without more ado Mr. Livermore went to the cricket field and, as we have seen, his mere presence stopped the fight.

"How did it begin?" he inquired of the bystanders, and having heard the rights of the matter, sharply reproved Farley, telling him it was cowardly and base to insult a weaker boy than himself, and that Armstrong, whose spirit he commended, was fully justified in retaliating.

"But," he added, "you should not have called Farley a liar."

"It was a lie, though," quoth Jack bluntly.

"Doubtless. Yet you should have put it in another way; said it was untrue or slanderous. Better strike a man at once than call him a liar. But go into the house, both of you, and get your faces bathed and buttered, or you will neither be able to see nor fit to be seen to-morrow."

Which they did; but Armstrong received much more sympathy and attention than Farley. Jack had won Mrs. Livermore's favor by mending her clock and making it keep time, and several other odd jobs he had done for her. Also, he was looked upon as the weaker party, and Farley as the aggressor.

Polly Perkins was quite undone.

"Oh, dear, what a face!" she cried. "You look bad now; to-morrow you will be horrid. But there is one consolation, Farley's is worse. He'll have two horrid, black eyes. One of them is swollen up already. I knew you were clever, Armstrong, but I had no idea you were both clever and brave, and could box like one o'clock, as Cuffe says, and he says too, that if the fight had gone on you would have beaten Farley into fits. I wish you had, I'm sure he deserved it."

Jack was pleased with Polly's praise, but he felt by no means sure that he would have beaten Farley, and was not at all sorry that Mr. Livermore's interposition had converted a doubtful contest into a drawn battle.

Among the boarders, opinions were divided. Each champion had his partisans; some thought Armstrong would have won, others felt sure that he could not have fought another round. But there was no difference of opinion as to Jack's quality. A fellow who had held his own against Farley for thirty minutes and given him a couple of black eyes could lick any other fellow in the house. Henceforth he was allowed to live in peace, and treated with the consideration and respect which boys as well as men, or even more than men, accord to prowess and courage. The very lads who had jeered and scorned him now flattered and toadied him; some even pretended to admire his Lancashire accent, and there sprang up a legend that his father was a great ironmaster of good family, and very rich.

The moral of it was pointed out for Jack's benefit by Mr. Noble. "If you want applause," he said, "you must excel and be strong."

And the lad had a mind to excel, though, except in mathe-

matics, he had a great deal of leeway to make up, and found it hard work. But Mr. Noble, who was a born teacher, seconded his efforts so well that he made rapid progress, and even satisfied Mr. Livermore's rather exacting requirements in the matter of Latin. As the chief remarked to his lieutenant, Armstrong brought a fresh mind to everything, and forgot nothing. Before the end of his second half-year he was put in a class with boys of his own age, and his father and Dr. Chorley were informed how well he was going on. In his letter to the doctor, Mr. Livermore observed that John was still growing, that his health was not completely re-established, and that it would be a pity to take him from school until his education was completed or, at any rate, further advanced.

This led to an interview between the father and the doctor who, somewhat to his surprise, found Matthew quite ready to fall in with his views.

"It's aw reet, let th' lad stay another year," said he. "But there's no occasion for him to come home for th' holidays. It 'ud cost three or four pounds, one way and another, and Mr. Livermore's terms is inclusive—so much a year—and quite enough, too. I'm fain now I made that a condition."

The truth was that Matthew was beginning to be proud of his prosperity, and just a little boastful. He liked to tell people that "our John" was costing him a matter of eighty pounds a year, "a sight o' brass and as much as I used to addle [earn], and not long sin' nayther. But th' lad's shaping gradely weel, and education's a fine thing and it will n't break me." And then Matthew would laugh complacently and produce Jack's latest letter and Mr. Livermore's report of his son's progress,

and say: "There now, what thinken you o' that? L'arnin' Latin and top o' th' schoo' i' mathematics."

He liked the idea of making "our John" a "bit o' a gentleman." The head of the family had another reason for lengthening Jack's scholastic tether. The idea of making him "a bit of a gentleman," had taken his fancy, probably because he saw that from a business point of view it was desirable that one of his sons should be well bred, or, as he put it, "know how to behave i' ony soort o' company," and able to correspond and converse with scholarly customers on equal terms.

Mark and Luke were industrious, steady, clever, and invaluable, but they wrote with difficulty and spelled anyhow, and when, as occasionally happened, they tried to talk "fine," the old man laughed sardonically, and told them that their fine talk sounded "waur than rank Whitebrook," thereby meaning broad Lancashire. So it came to pass that Jack Armstrong was allowed to stay at Ashcombe a second year and a third, and did not return to Whitebrook until after a lapse of nearly four years. To his great satisfaction, for unlike most schoolboys, he had no desire to spend his holidays at home. He had never found home particularly sweet, and life at Ashcombe was very pleasant. Once he had got through the preliminary ordeal he found the work light, and had ample leisure for amusement and recreation. The holidays, when he became, for the time being, a parlor boarder and a member of the head master's family, were especially agreeable. There were long country rambles, boating on the Thames and the Wey, which were within easy reach, and more than once he accompanied the Livermores to the seaside. But what lent the greatest zest to these interludes was the presence of Polly Perkins,

who, though her education was being completed at a London boarding school, spent her holidays at Ashcombe. She was as lively and lovely as ever, and wildly adored by Jack, whom she kept in a continual state of excitement by alternately flirting with him and giving him the cold shoulder. But her disdainful moods never lasted long, and there was always an exchange of tender adieus before she departed for London.

No wonder, therefore, that John Armstrong liked his new life and had no wish to revisit Whitebrook. He feared that if he did he might not be allowed to return to Ashcombe. Yet everything comes to an end, and when his third year drew to a close he felt sure that he should be ordered home. That his father would let him remain at school another term was past hoping for. But instead of the expected letter of recall there came one written by the bookkeeper at his master's dictation (who, though he could make shift to read manuscript, seldom or never penned aught save his own sign manual), asking whether John had learned French, adding that if not he must do so "whatever it cost," and as quickly as possible, for he was wanted at home. To which Mr. Livermore, who desired to keep Jack as long as might be, answered that, French not being in the curriculum, John had not learned it. Nevertheless he should immediately begin to take lessons in the language from one of the masters, who had a very fair knowledge of it, and would undertake to ground him in it thoroughly. This would take six months. If, however, it was necessary for John to acquire a thorough mastery of French and fluency in conversation, Mr. Livermore recommended that he should afterward go for at least six months to a French school. To this proposition Matthew Armstrong gave a

qualified and grudging approval. He thought John ought to learn French easily in six months, nevertheless he would say nine, and this was final. He could not allow a week longer. Mr. Livermore might divide the time between France and England as he thought best.

"Your father is extending his business and making money," observed Mr. Noble to Jack, when they were talking the matter over.

"I dare say," answered Jack, "but what makes you think so?"

"His desiring you to learn French at any cost implies that he does not count cost, therefore that he is rich, while his wanting you at home so soon as you have learned it, shows that he is getting orders from France, and, perhaps, other foreign countries."

CHAPTER IV.

MR. NOBLE was right in both his inferences. Matthew Armstrong had prospered, or, as he preferred to phrase it, " done middling weel," else had not " our John " been allowed to remain so long at Ashcombe and ordered to learn French regardless of expense. The foundry answered, and with the profits it produced Matt built a machine shop and "went into loom making," as much because he knew it to be a good business as because looms are made chiefly of cast-iron. Then, by way of keeping the new department busy and showing potential customers what he could do, he built a loom shed, filled it with machinery of his own make, and went into the cotton trade. This was not achieved " all in a day," nor without trouble, anxiety, and some risk. There were times, when, as Matthew told Mark and Luke, he did not know " which way to turn for brass," but he always contrived to be up to time with his payments, and when Jack began to learn French was both well off and, for the time being, in the smooth waters of financial ease. For a business man of enterprise may easily be well off yet hard-up.

The secret of Matthew's success, apart from his personal qualities, which comprised industrial ability of a high order, was doing good work. He gave good work at the outset because he saw no other way of making a living; for a new beginner to send out flawed castings

would have been fatal. This honesty—for what is more dishonest than bad work?—brought its reward in the shape of fresh orders and new customers.

Matthew drew the right conclusion.

"It doesn't pay to scamp," he observed, one night as he and his sons sat smoking their pipes after a long day at the shop. "Where should we ha' been if we had scamped? And if you'll take notice, it isn't oft as a man fails as does good work. We'll do nowt else, lads, as long as I'm on th' job, and if you're wise you'll do nowt else when I'm on th' shelf."

And on this policy they acted strenuously and consistently, making machinery and calicoes on the same principle as they made castings. Barring oversight and accidents, nothing imperfect, or not answering to specification, was allowed to "go off th' ground," and when an oversight did occur it was repaired without demur, the result being that the Armstrongs gained as high a reputation for making excellent machinery as they had already gained for making sound castings. And their reputation was not limited to Whitebrook, or even to Lancashire.

One day there came letter addressed to the firm which nobody "on th' ground" could read. But as it was dated from Rouen, and Luke Armstrong felt sure that Rouen was in France, it was presumably written in the language of that country.

"Who is there as knows French?" asked Matthew, running his finger along the lines of the mysterious epistle in a vain attempt to make out its meaning.

Several peole were mentioned who knew French, but none to whom application could be made in the present emergency. It was obviously impossible to apply to the

son of a rival machine maker who was said to be conversant with the language, or to the vicar. The Armstrongs seldom went to church, and Matthew had flatly refused to give anything toward the building of the new steeple.

"How would Lawyer Gibson do?" suggested Mark.

"Nay, by gum! Not if I know it," exclaimed his father, thumping the desk with his fist. "He'd make a bill on it as long as my arm. So much for being axed whether he knows French, so much for saying as he does, so much for taking instructions, so much for reading th' letter o'er, so much for axing somebody else what it means, or looking in a dictionary; a sovereign for th' translation, thirteen and fourpence for making a fair copy, and, as like as not, six and eightpence for sending his office lad up wi' it. Nay, Mark, we'll have nowt more to do wi' lawyers than we can help. Is there nobody else?"

Here the chief bookkeeper suddenly remembered having heard that a French teacher had lately set up in the town.

"Just th' mon. Fot him. He'll not be aboon addling hoaf a crown by telling us what this gibberish means."

"I don't know where he lives."

"You have an English tongue i' your heyd. Fot him," repeated Matthew peremptorily, whereupon the bookkeeper looked small and disappeared.

An hour or two afterward he returned and reported that though he had found out where the French teacher lived he had not found him at home. The gentleman was giving lessons in a neighboring town, and would not be back until late in the evening. But the bookkeeper had heard of a French governess at Miss Bland's seminary for young ladies. How would she do?

"Fot her," ordered Matthew.

The bookkeeper stared, and Mark remonstrated.

"If hoo's a young lass, and ten to one hoo is, it isn't likely as they'd let her come here wi' Robinson, or any other man as they don't know."

"There's summat i' that," returned Armstrong, senior, reflectively. "Well, thee go, and take th' letter wi' tha. Hoo'll tell thee i' five minutes what it means, and tha can just jot it down."

Mark, who was shy by nature, and unused to any society more refined than that of weavers and winders, demurred, saying that he did not know Miss Bland, even by sight, and suggested that his father himself should undertake the job.

"Nay, bithmon I," was the answer. "I'm too throng. All tha has to do is to knock at th' door and tell Miss Bland as we've gotten a letter as we can make nowt on, and ax her kindly to let her French governess tell tha what it's about, and as we'll pay her for her trouble."

"But I shall have to wash and don mysel," pleaded the young man.

"Of course tha will. Tha surely wouldn't go to a seminary for young ladies i' them greasy clothes! And shave too. That chin o' thine is like a worn-out hand brush. Be off, now!"

Mark, who had been brought up to obey his parents, and saw that his father was in earnest, left the office, looking very unhappy, and muttering as he went, "I'd sooner be licked."

Nevertheless, he did exactly as he had been bidden, and presented himself at the seminary arrayed in the bravery of a "holiday shirt" and his Sunday suit; and when he was well washed, shaven, and "donned," Mark

was not a bad-looking fellow. He had a burly frame, brawny limbs, big black whiskers, and a broad good-humored face, by no means devoid of intelligence.

The maid, who answered his knock and asked his name, showed him into the drawing room, and invited him to take a seat, whereupon Mark let himself cautiously down into a spindle-shanked chair, which he was terribly afraid would collapse under his weight.

Presently entered to him Miss Bland, a little, sharp-visaged, middle-aged lady, her countenance wreathed in smiles. Like everybody else at Whitebrook, she had heard of the Sons of Belial, and imagined that in view of their rising fortunes young Armstrong had called to arrange with her for repairing the defects in his sisters' education, which, considering the circumstances of their early life, had naturally been much neglected.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Mark," she said, as they shook hands. "Quite delighted, I assure you. I hope sometime to have the pleasure of making your father's acquaintance. People say that he is the most enterprising man in Whitebrook and likely to be one of the richest." Then as Mark, rather overwhelmed by this compliment and his hostess' effusive manner, did not immediately reply, Miss Bland added: "Might I ask to what I am indebted for the pleasure of this visit? If there is anything I can do for you, pray command me."

"Thank you kindly," says Mark warmly. "Well, it is just i' this way. We have got a letter fro' France as none on us can read, and my father thought as you would happen to do him th' favor to let your new French governess interpret it for him."

Miss Bland smiled no more. Her face resumed its wonted wintry aspect. Her visitor had come to ask, not

to confer, a favor, and she was on the point of giving him an icy answer when it occurred to her that, as the Armstrongs were getting on, and there was just a chance of her securing the daughters as elderly, albeit backward, pupils, she might just as well be civil to the young man.

"You mean Mademoiselle," she said. "But she is not an ordinary governess, let me tell you. She has come to learn English and give conversation lessons to some of my more advanced pupils. And she is not French ; she is a Suissesse of good family."

"A what ?" exclaimed Mark.

"A Suissesse, which, you may not be aware, signifies a Swiss lady. Mlle. Hermance is a native of Switzerland, and conversant with the three languages of the Confederation—French, German, and Italian. When she has acquired a knowledge of English she will be quite a linguist. Might I glance at the letter you wish to have translated. I am quite familiar with the French tongue."

Mark handed Miss Bland the document, and, putting on a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, and an air of importance, she scrutinized it severely, but, as presently appeared, not with understanding.

"I never saw anything so badly written ; it is quite impossible to spell it out, and the little of it that is legible is so technical that I am afraid I cannot undertake to give you the sense of it. I was not brought up in a machine shop, Mr. Mark, neither was Mlle. Hermance. Nevertheless, she may be able to throw some light on the subject."

On which the schoolmistress left the room, and a few minutes later returned with the lady in question.

Mark rose from his gimcrack chair with a jack-in-the-box like spring which made its slender shanks bend

almost to breaking. He had expected to see a dark-haired, brown-skinned woman,—he thought all foreigners were dark,—with the grave and learned air that beseems a linguist and a scholar, and probably a pair of blue spectacles perched on a prominent nose. What he beheld was a charming young girl, tall and shapely, her face oval, her features slightly aquiline, her hair auburn, her eyes blue, large, and laughing, save when she veiled them with her pink lids and long lashes, and then she looked as demure as you please. Mark, who was dumfounded, responded to Mademoiselle's courtesy with a clumsy bend of his back and a bob of his head, stammering something that sounded like "I hope I see you well."

Miss Bland gave Mlle. Hermance the letter, and with obvious difficulty and effort said something in French, to which the Suissesse, when she had read the letter, replied partly in the same language, partly in broken English.

"It is as I thought," explained Miss Bland; "the letter is so technical that it can only be understood by somebody having an intimate knowledge of machinery. The gist of it is that the writers, Messrs. Pathek & Co. of Rouen, want an estimate for something or other in your line. You had better get your letter translated by somebody who knows about machinery and that."

Mark thanked the ladies "kindly,"—it was always "kindly,"—and said he thought he would be going back to the shop.

"Just one moment, pray," put in the schoolmistress, in her pleasantest manner; "I hope you will excuse the liberty, if it be a liberty, but I want to speak to you about your sisters. If anything is lacking in their education, and they would like to acquire the accomplishments which their position and prospects demand, I shall be happy to

receive them here as private pupils, and supervise their studies in person. I have an admirable staff of teachers, and we can give them efficient instruction in singing, the pianoforte, use of the globes, English grammar and composition, *belles lettres* the rudiments of Latin when so desired, French, arithmetic, history, ancient and modern, sacred and profane, æsthetics, mathematics, dancing, deportment, and calisthenics—in short whatever pertains to a polite education."

Then she paused for a reply, and Mark paused before he made it. Between Miss Bland's volubility and Mademoiselle's beauty the poor young man was well nigh stricken dumb.

"Thank you kindly," he said at length. "Would you mind writing it down, and I'll tell 'em when I get home?"

"Shall I put it in a letter and send it, with one of our new prospectuses, to the Misses Armstrong? They would have the advantage of associating with Mademoiselle, who is quite a lady, and highly accomplished."

"Just the thing. Do, and I'll back you up."

And then Mark shook hands with the ladies, and went his way, thinking a vast deal less about the French letter than the Swiss maid.

"The bonniest lass I ever saw i' my life," said he to himself. "There isn't her marrow i' Whitebrook, nay nur in aw Lancashire. Her een are like jewels. If our lasses would take lessons I could fot 'em home sometimes, and then I should have a chance o' seeing her. But hoo's far aboon me, knows three or four languages, and I don't know one gradely. However, a chap can learn."

And by way of beginning Mark called at a bookseller's and brought a grammar and a spelling book, also a work

entitled, "The Rules of Good Behavior." Then he called at a hairdresser's and bought a pot of pomatum, and a bottle of scent, next at a draper's and brought a pair of gloves.

On the following day the French teacher, a certain M. Rat, was sent for, and translated the letter, and as other similar communications were afterward received from various quarters his help was often required, and though this system did not work altogether satisfactorily it served. But one day a French-speaking gentleman, unskilled in the English tongue, called at the works and made it understood that he desired to see Mr. Armstrong. They saw each other, and that was all, for albeit the Frenchman made strenuous efforts to express himself in English, and Matthew did his level best to grasp his visitor's meaning, the result was a dismal failure. Matthew could not even ask him where he was staying, or to call again and make M. Rat his mouthpiece. So the potential customer, with all sorts of bows and scrapes and many smiles, took his leave, and Matthew heard a few days later that he went straight to Tomlinson & Trotter's, rival machine makers, one of whom knew a smattering of French, and gave them a large order.

"Drat Tomlinson & Trotter!" exclaimed Matthew. "I'm not going to be bested by beggars like them."

And then the order was sent for "our John" to learn French.

John did not often write to his people, probably because his people wrote even less often to him. His father never wrote save strictly on business—through an amanuensis—and with business-like brevity; his mother could not write, and his brothers would not. From his sister Nancy only did he now and then, perhaps three

times a year, receive an ill-spelled letter, giving him a few odds and ends of local and family news.

So when, shortly after the issue of the order in question, to which Jack responded in due course, and the matter was regarded as settled, Matthew found on the office table a letter addressed in his youngest son's handwriting, he was rather surprised, and just a little annoyed. It was against his principles to reopen closed questions, and he disliked superfluous letters. They made so much bother.

When he read the letter his surprise increased, and during the remainder of the morning he looked serious and preoccupied.

"Is there owt wrong wi' our John?" inquired Luke, who had seen the postmark on the letter.

"Nay, there's nowt wrong wi' th' lad," returned the father, and that was all the answer Luke could get.

When Matthew had eaten his dinner he changed his coat, scraped his chin, and announced that he was going into th' town, where he had two or three "arrands" to do.

The "arrands" consisted in smoking a pipe and drinking a glass of rum and water in the bar parlor of the Bay Horse, and then taking a stroll in Market Street—with an object. This thoroughfare was the Regent Street of Whitebrook. Here were the best shops, and here the ladies of the locality did their shopping. Walking up and down the street with wide-about eyes Matthew presently spied a well-appointed landau and pair drawn up before a drapery store. As the carriage was empty he presumed that the owner of it was in the shop, and a lady presently emerged therefrom, followed by an assistant laden with packages—a tall, stately lady of good pres-

ence and a sweet sympathetic face, still comely in spite of her forty or more years.

When her parcels had been deposited in the landau, she followed them, on which the footman shut the door, and asked?

"Where now, ma'am?"

"To Earnsdale House," was the answer.

Just then Matthew Armstrong, who had meanwhile drawn close to the carriage, caught the lady's eye, whereon she nodded to him—rather condescendingly; but seeing that he desired speech of her, bade the coachman "wait a minute."

Matt laid his hand on the side of the laudau, and leaning forward said, in a voice too low to be heard by the servants: "Just one word with you, Mrs. Clinchworthy. Read that," at the same time giving her Jack's letter.

The lady took the letter with an air of amused and slightly contemptuous surprise, but as she read it her countenance underwent a portentous change, her high color became death-like pallor, her eyes fixed in a stony stare, and drops of sweat beaded on her brow. A second time she read the letter, and then, rallying, looked anxiously and imploringly at Armstrong.

"It is impossible! He is dead," she whispered, in a in husky voice.

"Folk said so, and we all believed it. But chaps like Paul is never in a hurry wi' their deeing. It would be a good job for th' world if they wor."

"But Paul Armstrong is not such a very uncommon name. There may be more than one."

"More than one! I dare say there's scores. But not so many as comes fro' Barrow, and th' age tallies. A

man of about forty-five, our John says, and Paul's forty-four. John's all there. You see he didn't let on. That's what I call gradely sharp."

Mrs. Clinchworthy did not seem much interested in John's sharpness. She leaned back in the carriage, her eyes filled with tears, her face wrung with the agony of her thoughts.

"Oh, what shall I do ?" she murmured. "If it is Paul I should like to kill him. He deserves it, if ever man did. But do you think he knows ? Is he likely to come here ?"

"I don't think he knows we are living here, but if he goes to Barrow he'll find out fast enough, though if it were me Barrow would be th' last place as I'd show my face in."

"Well, let us hope he won't get as far. It's a long way from Surrey to Barrow, and whether this man be the Paul we knew or not, he seems poor."

"Poor ! He will n't be poor long. Paul's one o' them chaps as would rob a cripple of his crutches and tell him to be thankful as he didn't strip him of his shirt. He's a son of Belial now, if you like."

"But you will keep this to yourself, Matthew, for the sake of auld lang syne, and just warn your son to be discreet. He appears to be a very fine young fellow. And if you hear anything further, let me know. Not through the post. Leave a note at White's bookshop, and I can get it by hand. You can guess why."

"I guess I can. Well, good-day to you, Mrs. Clinchworthy. I hope nayther of us will ever see owt o' Paul agean, unless it be his corpse."

"Drive home, Bromley. I don't feel well," said Mrs. Clinchworthy to her coachman.

"For the sake of auld lang syne!" mused Matthew. "All very fine, Susan. But it isn't very long since, as you would hardly so much as look at me when we met in th' street. However, you are brought to your cake and milk now. Bith' mon, I thought she wor going to swoon, and that would ha' been awkerd for both on us."

CHAPTER V.

ON a Saturday evening, shortly after he had begun to learn French, John Armstrong was walking homeward from the village green, where he had been playing cricket. As it chanced, he was alone, all his companions being in front, an opportunity by which a somewhat questionable looking stranger profited to accost him.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Armstrong," said he, "but I thought you would, maybe, kindly help a lame dog over a stile?"

"How the deuce do you know my name?" asked Jack, eyeing the fellow askance, who, notwithstanding his seedy attire, did not look altogether like a professional tramp. True, his shoes were dirty and down at the heel; but he was clean and did not cringe, and his clothes, though shabby, were well saved. A powerfully built man, past forty, with slightly bowed shoulders, eyes alternately bold and shifty, and a hard, deeply bronzed, wrinkled face, which did not win Jack's confidence, either at first sight or on closer inspection.

"I heard 'em call you by that name on the green, sir," returned the man, "and as it happens to be my own, I thought I might make bold to ask you for a trifle to help me on my way."

Jack, who knew, both theoretically and from boyish experiences at Whitebrook, that all men are not truthful, had little doubt that this man was lying.

"I don't see why I should give you money because you choose to call yourself Armstrong," said he. "A wanderer like you can take any name he likes."

"'So, young sir, you think I am lying," answered the suppliant quietly, yet with an unpleasant smile. "Well, you are quite at liberty to put me to the test. They were saying on the green that you come from the north. So do I. Were you ever at Barrow-in-Furness?"

"No."

"At Lancaster?"

"Nor at Lancaster."

"Preston, happen?"

"Yes, I have been to Preston."

"Well, I was born at Barrow, and know every yard of that country. Many's the time I've sailed across Morecambe Bay to Poulton, and then footed it to Lancaster and Preston. The first time I saw anybody scragged was at Lancaster, and the night after I scragged half a dozen hares in the preserves of Winmarleigh. Ay, Paul Armstrong was a wild chap i' them days. But he has gone through a good deal since then and wants nothing so much as to lead a quiet, honest life. Now, are you satisfied that my tale is true?"

"At any rate, I am satisfied that you are a north countryman, and have seen more of Lancashire than I have myself."

A startling idea had occurred to Jack. He knew that his father had a brother Paul who, as the former put it, "turned out a scamp and deserved to be hanged," and whom he hoped, rather than believed, "was gone to kingdom come."

How very unpleasant it would be if this were the man and he should claim him for a relative! The mere

thought made Jack shudder. So far, however, no such idea seemed to have occurred to the *soi-disant* Paul Armstrong, and Jack was careful not to give him a clew.

"What part of the county might you be from, sir?" he asked.

"The East."

"But about yourself? Where have you been lately, and what's your lay now?"

"I have been to a good many places, but mostly at sea, mostly at sea. Six weeks and three days since we were cast away off the Spanish coast, and lost everything but what we stood up in. We were sent home at the country's expense, and last week landed at Southampton, where I got a present of this rig-out and five bob. I am now making for London, where I dare say I shall be able to pick up a living of some sort; I'm getting too old for a seafaring life. But the five bob is all gone, and I've had no dinner and see no prospect of supper, so if you would kindly——"

Jack gave him a shilling, at which, as he thought, the vagabond glanced rather contemptuously.

"It isn't a bad tip for a schoolboy," observed Jack. "If you don't like it I shall be glad to have it back."

"I like it so well, sir, that I should be glad to have a few more, say a hundred, of the same sort. It will find me in a supper and a night's lodgings, and as for to-morrow I must trust to Providence. Thank you kindly, sir. That is the Grammar School, I suppose?" pointing to it.

"Yes, that's the Grammar School."

"And the fine old-fashioned house alongside, with the mullioned windows?"

"Is the head master's."

"Thank you once more, sir. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" returned Jack, resuming his walk with a sense of inexpressible relief. Until they actually parted he feared that Paul had a card up his sleeve, and at the last moment would assert his relationship and claim him as nephew. Else had he cut the interview short with scant ceremony.

It was only right that his father should be informed of the incident, and when he got home Jack wrote a brief account of it, not telling everything, yet omitting nothing essential, and an hour later the letter which so surprised his father and terrified Mrs. Clinchworthy was on its way to Whitebrook.

That night John Armstrong slept less soundly than usual. His thoughts ran much on the vagabond who might be of his blood, and of the portentous consequences which so undesirable a kinship rendered possible; and his rest was disturbed by unpleasant dreams all circling round the same individual, each of them more absurd than the other.

When he awoke the first question that occurred to him was: "Suppose the villain turns up during the day, knocks at Mr. Livermore's door, and asks for his nephew? I should repudiate him, of course, and if he gave any bother give him in charge; but if the chief, or Mr. Noble, were to inquire whether my father had a brother of the name of Paul, and what sort of a fellow he was, I should be in a tight fix."

These, and other thoughts of like tenor, and the drowsiness arising from his bad night made John slow with his dressing, and when he got downstairs prayers were just about to begin. Nevertheless, he could see that something extraordinary had happened. There was

no mistaking the intent, eager expression of the boys' faces, and, notwithstanding the solemnity of the occasion and Mr. Livermore's presence, there was a continuous hum of excited whisperings.

"Silence!" thundered the head master. "Silence, I say! If there is any more noise I shall read a second chapter."

The threat had the desired effect. Quietness prevailed, and the function was finished in peace. But no sooner had the final "Amen" unsealed the worshipers' lips than their tongues began to wag, fast and furious, and all together.

"What's the row?" asked John of his next neighbor.

"Don't you know? Haven't you heard? Why the house has been broken into and burgled. All the silver gone, and some of the fellows' clothes. They got in at the library window, and had a regular blow out, fetched grub from the pantry, and drank a lot of Livermore's best port. Poor Mrs. Livermore is quite in a state. She says it's a mercy all our throats were not cut; a sort of Massacre of the Innocents, you know, up to date, and that. They would have had a toughish job, though, to cut my throat. Nobody knows how many of them there were—some think four, others six. The maids were all in a tremble, and the cook has had hysterics—a bad look-out for breakfast that, I'm afraid."

Jack's prophetic soul had already suggested that the man who called himself Paul Armstrong, and was only too probably his uncle, had had a hand in the business, and finding it impossible to get any trustworthy or even coherent information either from his comrades or the women folk he applied to Mr. Noble, with whom he was now on terms of almost fraternal friendship.

The second master told him all he knew, which was very little, because there was very little to tell.

"If burglary were a less serious offense I should be disposed to set the fellow down as a practical joker. Anyhow, he is a wag," said the second master.

"The fellow! Why, I thought there were five or six of them."

"Nonsense! Only one; we have traced his footsteps in the garden. We lock and bolt the doors very carefully, but the windows are supposed to take care of themselves. It is seldom that one or more of them is not either left unfastened or open. On this occasion it was one of the library windows. The thief had simply to step in, which he did very coolly. Once inside he proceeded to make himself comfortable. He lighted the candles, fetched ham and bread from the pantry, and wine from the cellar, and, no doubt, made a hearty meal. Then he seems to have explored the hall and passages, and lighting on a coat, and hat, and boots that fitted him, substituted them for his own, on the principle, I suppose, that exchange is no robbery. He also pocketed a few silver spoons; that was robbery, and after thanking Mr. Livermore for his hospitality returned as he had come."

"Thanking Mr. Livermore for his hospitality? How did he manage that?"

"In writing. He left a polite note on the library table. I told you the fellow was a wag."

"Who were the victims?"

"Mr. Livermore as touching the food and drink, hat and coat; one of the boys as touching the boots."

"What boy?"

"That I cannot tell you. One of the oldsters, I suppose. Let us go and see."

They went and saw, and Jack found to his vexation that he was the second victim. A pair of "bluchers" which he had left at the foot of the dormitory stairs were gone, and in their place appeared a pair of dilapidated lace-ups which he thought he recognized. But as one pair of old boots may easily be confounded with another, he inspected the burglar's coat. This time there could be no mistake; it was undoubtedly the same as that worn by the vagabond to whom he gave the shilling. But this discovery he kept religiously to himself, and was delighted to hear, later in the day, that the head master had not taken any very vigorous measures to insure the delinquent's arrest. True, he had sent for the local police officer, who opined that the robbery had been committed by "one of them tramps," and advised Mr. Livermore to be more careful about the fastening of his windows. He also said he should report the affair to his inspector, but as no description of the supposed thief was obtainable he did not think there was much likelihood of catching him.

Having thus, as it were, made himself right with the law, Mr. Livermore let the matter drop. The fellow had not acted like a professional burglar, and was probably driven to crime by poverty. At any rate he must have been very hungry. Moreover, the booty he had secured was insignificant and prosecution troublesome.

"Let us say no more about it," said the head master philosophically. "It serves us right—me particularly, for I was the last to go to bed—for leaving the window open, and, after all, the rascal was very moderate or very enterprising. Most of the silver was in the sideboard cupboard, and if he had forced the lock he would have made a big haul."

Of all these things Jack Armstrong sent an account of his father, and asked him whether he thought the vagabond who had done him out of a shilling and stolen his boots was really his Uncle Paul.

A few days later he received a letter in reply, the first he had ever seen wholly in his father's handwriting, all previous communications having been dictated to the bookkeeper. The composition had obviously been a matter of difficulty, and so unaccustomed was Matthew to the use of the pen that divers of the letters, and, in one or two instances whole words, were printed. Thus the missive ran:

"dear sun,

"it's aar Paul, bout a dout, god'o'mighty never med two o' th' same naim fro' th' same place, and one as nowt as t'other. Beside, it's him, all o'er. He'd tak owt as wornt two ot or two heavy to carry. If e didn't tak moor it's becos he thowt as if he dud th' polees ud be ot after im, and he'd get lagged, or, moor like, heed no tools. Heel noan kum bak to Ashcombe, but if e duz and trize to bleed thee ageean, say as thoul giv im i' charge and heel ook it sharp. Chaps o' Pauls kidney duzn't like th' polees. Doant say a word to nobody. Tha did reyt not to let on. Get thy frensh larnt, and larn it weel and soon. I want thee ere. This Rat's a foo; e didn't no frensh naything for sowlin tub nor cop bottoms.

"Tradé isn't as good as it wor, but ive noan it waur. I hope thissel find thee as weel as it leaves thy father.

"M. A."

This letter affected Jack painfully, and he pondered it long. There was effort in every line of it, and the fact

of his father having written it at all was evidence of his anxiety to keep secret his brother's appearance at Ashcombe. The orthography was ludicrous, but Jack knew that the letter exaggerated his father's illiteracy. He always went straight to his object, and, in many instances, no doubt, spelled phonetically in order to shorten his work, or a man who does not take a pen in hand, except to sign his name, once in a blue moon, writing even a short letter is an arduous task. Nevertheless, Jack regretted that his father could not write a letter fit to be seen, and he looked forward to his approaching return to Whitebrook with feelings the reverse of pleasurable. It was not work that he feared, but the lack of refinement, the perpetual sordid grind, the absence of congenial society, and he could not help mentally contrasting life at the cottage near the foundry gates with life at a country house, where he had spent the greater part of a previous vacation on the invitation of a schoolfellow, whose father was a broad-acred squire.

In this sense he spoke to Mr. Noble.

"Are you ashamed of your father, Jack?" asked his mentor gravely.

"No. I don't think I am ashamed of him. All the same, I cannot help wishing he had been a little better educated, and was a little more refined."

"Not that I think it is anybody's duty to be proud of a father simply because he happens to be his son," continued Mr. Noble. "I have known many a man of whom, were he my father, I should be heartily ashamed. But your father is one to be proud of, and you are under great obligations to him."

"You mean for sending me here?"

"Exactly. True, you had a rough upbringing, but he

was no better brought up himself, and when he found your health was suffering he sent you to Ashcombe, where he has let you remain all these years, and now you are to go to France. Nor is that all. Had he been an ordinary man you would have been working at a bench this moment. And he is not so badly educated, after all. He can read and write, which is more than the barons who signed Magna Charta, or even many a noble of the Tudor period, could do. You remember the lines in Marmion we were reading the other day, which Scott puts into the mouth of Douglas:

> "'Thanks to Saint Bothan, son of mine,
> Save Gawain, ne'er could pen a line.'

"From what you have told me of Mr. Armstrong I admire him greatly. He has risen in spite of great disadvantages. He has courage to dare, and ability to execute. He possesses qualities which I covet. I can manage a few boys, and teach Latin, Greek, and the rest, but he has created an industry, and can manage men. He is making a fortune, a part of which you will inherit, and if you inherit also a fair share of his executive ability you may be a millionaire. Many a man with a worse start has become a minister of state. Yes, he is a father to be proud of, and when you return to Whitebrook, don't, for Heaven's sake, give yourself airs, as if you were better or abler than he. You are not. He has done great things, and made you what you are; you, as yet, have done nothing except acquire a little knowledge at his expense."

This was a new view of the matter, the justice of which, however, Jack could not deny; and it made him think

more highly of his father than he had ever done before, and less of himself than he had latterly begun to think. Yet, though he confided so fully in Mr. Noble, and had told him all about his early life, he kept a still tongue as touching his vagabond uncle. He, at least, was a relative of whom it was impossible to be proud, and Jack wondered much and often what Paul had done to make his brother, who was not wont to be straitlaced, give him so terrible a character, and where he had been wandering during the long time which must have passed since he left Lancashire.

CHAPTER VI.

When Paul Armstrong had taken the benefit of Mr. Livermore's involuntary hospitality, partially renewed his outer man, pocketed the sugar tongs and a half a dozen silver spoons, which he found on the table, as also a cigar case inadvertently left there by a guest, he took his departure by the way he had come and shaped his course for London.

"If I had had a jemmy or a picklock I might have got more swag," he reflected, as he walked briskly along in the semi-darkness of the summer night. "People don't lock their sideboard cupboards when there's nowt in 'em worth taking. However, it's happen best as it is. I'm new in the burglary business, and moderation is always a safe card to play. If I had gone in for a big steal they might have had me tracked and given me a lot of trouble. But for what I have got it won't be worth their while. Besides, I shall be twleve or fourteen miles nearer London before they discover their loss, and they neither know what road I have gone nor what I look like. Unless that young jackanapes of a namesake of mine has a suspicion and tells the police. Don't think he will, though, he's too green; believed my tale and gave me a bob. Queer he comes from dirty old Lancashire. But there's plenty of Armstrongs in that quarter, and he can be no kin of mine; too much of a swell. . . Wonder what's become of Matt and .Susan? If I can do nowt

better I'll look 'em up, and make 'em shell out. But that must be the last shift. Matt was never a friend of mine, and might cut up rough, and if Susan *is* alive she's ten to one too poor to be bled. Anyhow, I'll try my luck in London first. If it isn't paved wi' gold there's gold to be got there."

Four hours after leaving Ashcombe the vagabond reached the neighborhood of Leatherhead, where at a little wayside inn he made a hearty breakfast, paying for it with John Armstrong's shilling.

He was joined at breakfast by a wayfarer who, the morning being warm, doffed his coat and threw it on a chair, when out of one of the pockets dropped, unperceived by the owner, a small leather case on which Paul promptly set his foot. The wayfarer said he was on his way to Portsmouth, and so soon as he turned his back Paul pocketed the leather case and resumed his journey. But before setting out he washed his face, brushed his hat, blacked his boots, and got a bonny shave, all of which so changed his appearance for the better that save for his necktie, which was shabby, his shirt front, which was brown, and his trousers, which were patched and frayed, he would have looked quite respectable, and even as it was might easily have been mistaken for a decent tradesman of penurious habits, or one who had fallen on evil days.

When he had left Leatherhead a mile or two behind him he got over the hedge by the roadside, and presently lighting on a hollow where the turf was well carpeted with grass, placed himself in an attitude of repose, and leaned against the bole of a leafy tree, murmuring:

"Of all the trades in England, begging is the best.
For when a man is tired he can sit him down and rest."

Then he drew forth the purloined cigar case, lighted a weed and proceeded to smoke.

"Not bad," he continued, in thought. "Indeed, I may say good, devilish good. It must have stood the bloke as owned it, at least sixpence. Now let's see what assets I've got," emptying his pockets. "Two bob and a tanner, four pennerth o' coppers, five silver spoons and a pair of sugar tongs. The cash will pay my way to London, and when I get there I can spout the swag for half a sovereign, at least. It is good heavy stuff and no crest on it, or any nonsense of that sort. That 'll keep me five or six days—and then? Well, I shall happen have a stroke o' luck. It's about due. I've had nowt but strokes of another sort this long while; and a chap can always either beg or borrow—as I borrowed these spoons. And now for a look at that bloke's bit o' leather. It's a greasy looking concern, and I don't suppose there's much in it. Papers," opening it, "nowt but papers, not even a postage stamp. They tell all about him. Phineas Herring, formerly a corporal in the Royal Marines, discharged with a good character from his commanding officer, and a clean record. Afterward, judging by the dates, porter and messenger in a store at Melbourne; can read and write. Another good character. Then comes a blank,—several years unaccounted for,—but latterly seems to have been steward on board the packet ship *Ocean Queen*. A third good character, also testimonials from passengers: sober, honest, attentive, and obliging. That's me to a T, and I'm Phineas Herring; and if these dokyments don't get me a nice soft place, with opportunities, my name was never Paul Armstrong."

And then the waif went on his way, walking at a good

steady pace, but every now and then profiting by the beggar's privilege to "sit down and rest." Several tramps tried to foregather with him, but he gave them the cold shoulder and short answers.

"I'm a peg above that lot now, and if I mean to find a billet I must keep myself respectable," he thought.

As Paul was descending a not very steep hill between Epsom and Croydon, portentous sounds fell on his ear—of galloping hoofs, rattling wheels, and a woman's cries. The next moment a runaway horse, followed by a phaeton, rounded a corner which had hitherto hidden them from view. In the front seat was a lady, wringing her hands and alternately screaming and appealing to Heaven for help.

Paul Armstrong was the last man in the world to risk hurting himself for anybody, and he had not the slightest intention of attempting to rescue the lady from her perilous position. But as the horse began to rise the brow he slackened pace, as though he were blown, whereupon it suddenly occurred to Paul that if he could stop the animal he would surely be handsomely rewarded, and the risk did not seem very great. So he stepped into the road, raised his arms and shouted: "Bring to, you lubber, bring to!"

But instead of bringing to the lubber came on faster, and Paul being unable to get out of the way, was forced in self-defense to seize the bridle, a proceeding which resulted in the runaway's arrest. Yet not before the rescuer had been dragged several yards, to the detriment of his clothes and cuticle.

"Thank you, thank you! I thank you with all my heart, you brave good man," cried the lady, bursting

into tears and sobbing hysterically. "My husband shall thank you too. You have saved me from a horrible death at the risk of your life. I thought the horse would have trampled you under his feet; and your clothes are torn and your hands bleeding. May Heaven reward you for your noble conduct!"

The outcast, who had never heard himself called good, noble, and brave before, grinned complacently, made light of his tattered garments and damaged skin, and, picking up the reins, asked the lady whether she desired to drive on.

"Goodness, no!" she exclaimed. "I'll never drive behind Timbertoes again. I am going to get out." And out she got.

"Can I lead him anywhere for you, madam?" asked Paul deferentially.

"You are really too good. If you will be so kind, and it is not troubling you too much, I shall be infinitely obliged if you will turn him round and lead him back. We stopped at the Wheat Sheaf to give Timbertoes some gruel. I wouldn't get out, but my husband did, and was slipping the reins into the saddle ring when something startled the horse, and off he went like a mad thing. I dare say we shall meet my husband."

As they presently did—riding furiously a barebacked horse, and followed by a gig, and, a long way behind, several people on foot.

The husband flung himself off his horse, and embraced his wife.

"Thank God, you are safe, Clara!" he exclaimed fervently.

"And this gentleman, to whom, under Providence, I owe my life," added the lady. "He stopped Timber-

toes most pluckily, after being dragged ever so far at great risk to himself."

"I am greatly obliged to you. My wife and I thank you. You have rendered me as great a service as one man can render another." And then, having decided that his benefactor would not be offended by an offer of money, the speaker added, putting his hand in his pocket, "It is a service that deserves to be handsomely rewarded."

But Paul, shrewdly thinking that an exhibition of proper pride would enhance his recompense, squared his shoulders, raised his head, and in a hurt voice answered:

"I am a poor man, it's true, sir, but I'm not a beggar."

The gentleman, taken aback by this unexpected rebuff, inquired whether there was nothing else he could do to show his gratitude, whereupon the waif had another felicitous thought.

"If you could find me some sort of place, sir," says he, "I should take it very kind. I have been most of my life at sea, but at my age a man wants to settle down, and I am now on my way to London to look out for a berth ashore. Here's my testimonials, sir; they will tell you all about me. I have nothing to keep back," producing the leather case.

The gentleman opened it.

"Very satisfactory, very satisfactory indeed," he observed, after he had read the papers. "I have always a kindly feeling for soldiers and sailors who have served their country long and faithfully. So you can read and write?"

"Yes, sir, and keep accounts in a plain way. I am also what they call a handy man and can do odd jobs of any sort."

"A general utility man, in fact. Well, I think I shall be able to meet your views, Mr. Herring, and if you will call at my place of business to-morrow, or the next day, I will see what I can do for you. Here is my card. But in the meantime you will at least let me compensate you for the damage to your garments. Those trousers are ruined."

And the gentleman slipped into Paul's hand a couple of gold pieces, which Paul took with affected reluctance and pocketed with intense pleasure.

By this time they were at the Wheat Sheaf, and the gentleman invited his wife to get into the phaeton. At first she refused, but when he pointed out that the horse was spent and in no condition to run away, and that he had bolted, not out of malice, but because, at the very moment his master was adjusting the reins, a wretched dog worried Timbertoes heels, the lady consented, and after again thanking the *soi-disant* ex-marine and taking leave of him, she and her husband drove toward London.

Paul sat down on a bench near the inn door, ordered a bottle of Bass, with bread and cheese, and proceeded to examine the gentleman's cards, a big one, which he had read, and a little one, which he had not. On the latter was inscribed:

MR. MARMADUKE GILTSPUR,
LABURNAM LODGE,
Dulwich.

The other card ran thus:

GILTSPUR & BRANDIWINE,
GOLDSMITHS AND SILVERSMITHS,
Dealers in Precious Stones.
Showrooms: Regent Street, London.
Warerooms and Factory: Hatton Garden.

Paul could hardly refrain from a shout of joy. But after taking a long drink and lighting one of the stolen cigars, he calmed down and gloated silently over his new prospects.

"The stroke o' luck has come at last," he thought. "And it is a stroke, a w'opper, a ripper, a stunner, an out-and-out eye-opener! Two sovs for stopping a horse, and promise of a berth with a gold and silver-smith and dealer in precious stones—diamonds, pearls, rubies, emeralds, bars of gold, and pigs of silver. Won't I just roll in 'em? Oh, that 'll be gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous! Strike me, if that don't sound like something I heard long sin'! Where? In the Sunday school at old Barrow. But it wasn't gorgeous, it was—— Dash it all, what does it matter? If I begin to think of them days—— Another chance, a chance of wealth. Nowt could be easier—gold and precious stones within reach of my arm. Honest and trustworthy! and I shall be trusted. All the same, suppose I try a fresh tack for once? They say it pays best in the end. I'm Phineas Herring now, with a clean record, and I'll be hanged if I don't begin to feel honestish already. Wonder how he feels. How if he turns up and—— I'd call him a liar and brazen it out; and at the worst it would only be a case of 'as you was.' Another bottle, waiter, and then I'll be off. I have an important engagement for to-morrow in London town."

CHAPTER VII.

JOHN ARMSTRONG returned from France a competent, if not an accomplished, French scholar, able to speak the language fluently and write business letters without difficulty. Moreover, during a short sojourn in a manufacturing town he had made himself master of divers technical terms which were likely to prove useful in his intercourse with his father's foreign correspondents and customers.

Jack had been invited to call at Ashcombe on his way north, an invitation which he accepted all the more readily as he hoped to see Polly Perkins, whom he still adored and believed he should adore forever. In one respect he was not disappointed. Polly was there, and on the eve of his departure they had an important talk, not exactly *en tête-à-tête*, for it took place in the garden, where they could be observed from the house, and might at any moment encounter some member of Mr. Livermore's family. Yet they were out of earshot and could converse at their ease.

"I am going to-morrow, Polly," says Jack sadly.

"So I hear, and I am very sorry," says she.

"Really?"

"Really and naturally. We have always been good friends. And I regard you in some sense as my pupil. Don't you remember the lesson I gave you on the day you came?"

"And many a one since," put in Jack.

"Yes, and many a one since—to your great benefit. When I think of you as you were—a pale, loutish, shambing lad, as ignorant as a fish and dropping your h's all over the place, I can hardly believe you are the same."

"You think I am improved, then?"

"Yes, and altered—for the better—so much that I don't think your people will know you when you get home. You do the school and all of us credit, Jack, and that is also my uncle's opinion."

The young fellow, highly elated, smiled complacently and glanced admiringly at his companion. She was certainly very pretty with her clear complexion, big black eyes, and golden-hued hair, and in Jack's opinion her up-turned nose, which, as some people thought, spoiled her beauty, enhanced her charms, and, emboldened by her praises and feeling that it was then or never, he spoke his mind—in tremulous accents and with a very red face, for the lad was by no means sure how his audacious proposal would be received.

"It is very good of you to be so kind—I mean it is very kind of you to be so good—to speak so kindly of me," he stammered in a way that made Miss Perkins stare. She had never heard him stammer, or seen him blush so deeply before, and then, guessing what was coming, she smiled.

"We have always been good friends, Polly."

"Always," echoed the young lady, "I said so just now."

"Very good friends."

"Very good friends."

"Well, I want us—I mean I want you to promise me something. But, first of all, may I tell you a secret?"

"Certainly. I like to know secrets, and, unlike some girls, I never betray them."

"Well, I fell in love with you the first time we met, and I love you still. I do really, and I want——"

A gratified and slightly mischievous smile flitted over Polly's fair face. Armstrong was not the only boarder by a long way who had fallen in love with her at first sight, and asked her to correspond with him, or begged for a lock of her hair.

"Well, what do you want?" she said, helping him out. "Don't be bashful."

"I want you to promise to marry me when we are old enough," returned Jack. And then, sighing deeply, he added in an intense whisper, "Darling Polly, you don't know how much I love you."

After a look of unaffected surprise, "darling Polly" began to laugh, and went on laughing until Jack, who was in deadly earnest, grew impatient, then angry.

"You seem to think I am joking. I assure you I am not. I was never more serious in my life," he said indignantly.

"That's just it. That's where the fun comes in," said Polly, after another burst of laughter. "If you were joking, there would be nothing to laugh at."

"I don't see what there is to laugh at now," exclaimed Jack, in high dudgeon. "I made you a serious proposal, and I expected a serious answer."

"A serious proposal from—— How old are you, Jack Armstrong?"

"Nearly nineteen."

"That means you are eighteen, and you have only just ceased to be a schoolboy, and haven't a penny to bless yourself with, except what your father chooses to give

you; and I am indebted to my uncle for the very bread that I eat, and yet you actually and in sober earnest make me an offer of marriage. Nothing to laugh at, indeed! Why, it is just killing," and again the young woman had to hold her sides.

Jack began to look disconcerted. He had not expected Polly to be so very personal and matter of fact, and was at a loss how to answer her.

"But I shall not always be eighteen," he observed, after a few seconds' thought, "and when I am twenty-one I dare say my father will give me an interest in the business, or, at any rate, an allowance that would enable me to marry, and it is quite a common thing at Whitebrook for fellows to marry at twenty-one."

"Even then you will be dependent on your father, and the man I marry must have a sure income, and be able to make settlements. You think I am mercenary. Well, I am, and I will tell you why."

Polly paused for a moment, and her face became as grave as Jack's.

"I will tell you why," she continued. "My father and mother married for love, and nearly all their capital went in furniture and et ceteras. But my father, who was an artist, thought he was going to make a name and a fortune by his brush, and my mother, who was literary, believed that in the meanwhile she could keep the pot boiling with her pen. In these expectations they were bitterly disappointed. The Academy would not hang his pictures, and the dealers would not buy them; and I suppose not one in six of the contributions which my mother offered to editors found acceptance. She wrote a novel for which, though it was well spoken of, she received nothing. Perhaps if they had had capital, and

my father could have studied his art abroad and at his ease, and my mother had not been compelled to write pot boilers, they might have succeeded. As it was they failed miserably, and were reduced to giving lessons—he in drawing, she in music. Here again, want of money was their ruin. It was necessary to live in a respectable house and keep up a respectable appearance, which cannot be done without money, and they could not afford to cultivate a connection and wait for pupils. Children were born, only to die for want of the care and dainties and the change of air which money alone can command, for all but myself were sickly. I was the sole survivor. If we had not been helped by friends we should have starved; and my parents being sensitive and proud it was only when they were reduced to the last extremity that they would ask for help. Money was raised on a bill of sale, and one day, the interest not being forthcoming, the furniture was swept away. We shifted from one poor lodging to another, we got into debt, and were often put to sore straits. Again and again I have had to go to the pawnshops when my poor mother lay ill. Oh, you don't know, words cannot tell, the humiliations we endured from the lack of money. It killed them both. My mother died first, and then, not long after, my father. Since their marriage, to which my uncle was strongly opposed, he and they had not been on speaking terms. They were too proud to ask him for help and he was too proud to offer it unsolicited. But when my father found that he was dying, pride died. He wrote to my uncle beseeching him to take charge of poor me. And nobly my uncle answered the call. He took me to his house and brought me up as his own child. As you know, he has spared no expense on my

education, and I shall soon be able to get my own living. He is not rich, and I will not be a burden to him a moment longer than I can help. I can best show my gratitude by making my own way."

"Poor Polly! I did not know the world had dealt so hardly with you," said Jack sympathetically.

"Few people do. It is not a subject I like either to talk about or think about, and I have not told you all. Enough for my purpose, however. My childhood's experience taught me many things, but the most vivid impressions it has left behind are horror of poverty and an abiding sense of the value of money. Root of all evil, indeed! The want of it is. You know now why I am mercenary, why for no man who breathes will I risk the fate that befell my mother."

"I don't think you are mercenary," exclaimed Jack, eager to profit by the opening which he thought Polly had given him. "No wonder, after what you have gone through, that you are cautious, and set a high value on money; and if you will only say you love me, I'll wait your pleasure and ask for nothing more."

"I could easily say I love you, only it wouldn't be true; for I don't," returned the girl dryly. "I like you well enough, and you are superior to most boys of your age——"

"Boys!" interrupted Jack indignantly.

"Aren't you a boy?" asked Polly, smiling mischievously. "However, as I have no wish tohurt your feelings, I will say young man; and I was going to say that if you were six or seven years older, and could make nice settlements, the liking I have spoken of might—unless meanwhile you had altered for the worse—ripen into love."

"But love is spontaneous! it comes of itself—you cannot help it. Remember Cupid is blind, and shoots his arrows at random."

"And his victims are mostly fools," added Polly. "People who fall in love because they cannot help it are idiots. I was reading a novel the other day: The heroine is jilted, and dies of a broken heart, like the weak, sentimental fool she was. Women who die of disappointed love deserve their fate. I have no patience with them."

Said Jack, who thought Polly's cynicism was a good deal, if not altogether, put on:

"Well, I won't argue the point with you. But promise me at least one thing—not to take up with any other fellow without giving me a chance."

"You mean that you want to have the refusal of me. Not if I know it, Jack, and I shall make no promises whatever, then I shall have no reproaches, either from you or my own conscience. And now, as we understand each other, let us change the subject. My education is nearly completed, but my uncle, who is really too good, insists on my going to Paris to acquire fluency in conversation and the orthodox accent, afterward to Hanover on a similar errand and to attend some lectures on pedagogy. That done, I shall be ready to take a situation as superior governess, and if you should hear of any Lancashire millionaire being in want of such an article, you will perhaps let me know."

"There are no millionaires at Whitebrook. There is half a one, though. They say Nathan Yates is worth five hundred thousand."

"Well, he would do. I don't stint myself to millionaires, and Mr. Yates could afford to pay me a handsome salary."

"But he's a bachelor."

"Then I'm afraid he won't want a governess. An old bachelor?"

"Not very—about forty. But if he were a Benedict and wanted a governess, Nathan would not pay you handsomely. He pays nobody handsomely."

"That's why he is so rich, I suppose. Mr. Yates is clearly not available. But there may be somebody else. All I stipulate is that my employers should be respectable, and able and willing to reward me according to my deserts."

"That means?"

"Fifty pounds a year to begin with, and an annual rise; and, considering my many and varied accomplishments, I shall be cheap at the price."

"I quite agree with you, and I will do my very best to get you a place at more than that. I shall ask sixty."

"And if you succeed I shall not be ungrateful, Jack," said Polly significantly, whereupon Jack jumped rather hastily to the conclusion that if he succeeded she would perhaps be a little more gracious.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOBODY met John Armstrong at Whitebrook station. Nobody knew him. He saw several familiar faces, but all stared at him blankly and curiously, as though they had never before set eyes on him. Gudgeon, otherwise Bottlenose, who had been a frequent caller at the Sons of Harmony in days gone by, and had given Jack many a ride on the box of his cab, took him for a stranger. Even when his fare bade him drive to Mr. Armstrong's no gleam of intelligence lighted up the old fellow's red and wrinkled visage.

"To th' shop or th' house?" he asked.

Jack was going to say "either," the two being cheek by jowl, when, bethinking him that the might as well keep up his character of stranger by feigning ignorance of the locality, he answered: "To the house," and then, folding his arms and pulling his hat over his eyes, lapsed into reverie. As yet, he had hardly recovered from the pain of leaving Ashcombe, and parting with the friends he had made there; and the contrast between the sweet Surrey village, with his background of pine wooded hills, and Whitebrook's sooty chimneys and grimy streets rekindled his regrets. Looking back on his childhood and its sordid surroundings always made him sad, and now the prospect of a life divided between the foundry and the little house opposite the foundry gates did not raise his spirits. Nevertheless he remained steadfast in his resolve

to abide by Mr. Noble's so often urged advice to do his duty, and show his father that he appreciated his kindness in sending him to Ashcombe and giving him so good an education.

But where the deuce was old Bottlenose going? Instead of turning down King Street he was making straight for the Preston New Road.

"Hallo, there! Do you know where Mr. Armstrong lives?" demanded Jack, putting his head out of the cab window.

"Coorse I do. Pye Nest, top o' Revidge."

"Nonsense, man! I was told that Mr. Armstrong—— You know him, I suppose?"

"Ay do I. Everybody i' Whitebrook knows owd Belial and his sons, as they ca' 'em."

Jack felt disposed to get out and pull Bottlenose off his perch, but as he was playing a part he deemed it expedient to pocket his affront.

"I was told the Armstrongs lived near the foundry."

"So they did; but they've flitted to Pye Nest. It's where Mester Nathan Yates lived afore he built hissel' a ho" (hall).

"How long since?"

"Abaat six months."

"Go on," said Jack, and pulling up the window, he sank back in his seat almost breathless with surprise.

It was fully six months since he had received any other news from home than the bookkeeper's addition to a recent remittance letter, "Your father and the family are quite well." The last thing of importance he had heard of was his elder sister's marriage to a certain Mr. Wardle, a man in the coal trade. But as touching the flitting he had not been vouchsafed a word; and that his father

should have committed the extravagance of taking such a place as Pye Nest was almost past belief. Jack knew it well. Once a timbered farmhouse, it had been converted by repeated enlargements into a mansion, and very well it looked, and from its breezy eminence commanded fine views. Also there were stables and gardens, and an avenue, and the usual amenities of a gentleman's residence. It seemed impossible, and was altogether so astonishing and incomprehensible that the young fellow began to suspect a hoax, and was debating within himself whether he should not order Bottlenose to turn round and drive straight to Canal Cottage when the cab stopped.

"This is Armstrong's," said Bottlenose, hopping from his perch and opening the cab door, "but th' gates is locked. Maun I go up to th' haas and ax for th' keys?"

Clearly no hoax; the man was as grave as a judge. Jack answered that he should enter by the wicket, and bade him put his box and other belongings in the avenue, and he would send for them. His folk had surprised him, and he meant to surprise them.

As Gudgeon clapped the box down he jumped as if it had burned him. He had seen the address.

"Wod—why—ye' don't mean to say as yo're th' youngest son, him as they used to ca' Little Jack, and went off to schoo' three or four years sin'?" he asked excitedly.

"I believe I am," said Jack quietly.

"May I be d——d and never dee a gradely death if I didn't think yo' wor a mon fro' foreign parts after looms. Why, when you went off yo' wor as thin as a lat and as white as a fent. And naa, bithmon, naa yo're five

ten i' yer stocking feet, lusty too, and as red under th' gills as a turkey cock. I couldn't ha' believed it. Yo'll be Master John naa, I reckun, and I ax yer pardon for what I said a bit sin'. Yo' know what I mean."

"I do, and if I ever hear you call my father 'Belial' again, I'll pull that Bottlenose of yours."

"I didn't know who you wor, Mayster John, or I wouldn't ha' done it, and I ax yer pardon," quoth Gudgeon humbly. Then, with a humorous twinkle in his eye he added: "It's a terrible place for nicknames, Whitebrook is; I'm Bottlenose, and yer father's Belial, and if I had hoaf his brass they mut ca' me 'Owd Scrat.'"

Jack laughed, paid Bottlenose his fare and sixpence over, then walked up to the house and knocked at the door, which was opened by his sister. She looked at him inquiringly, as much as to say: "Who may you be?" whereupon Jack smiled and Nancy, recognizing him, broke into exclamations:

"John, I do declare! To think I didn't know you! Goodness me, how you have grown! and we did not expect you till to-morrow or next day. Come in! Mother, here's our John!"

A side door opened and Mrs. Armstrong entered the hall, looking thinner and older than of yore, and, for the mistress of Pye Nest, not over well-dressed.

"Well, thou has getten back at last," she said.

A cold greeting after so long an absence, but there was a tremor in her voice, and a flush on her cheeks that belied her words, and her son, remembering only who she was, kissed her affectionately, saying:

"God bless you, mother!"

Then she flung her arms round his neck, and looking up at him with streaming eyes, she exclaimed passion-

ately: "God bless thee, my bonnie lad!" to Jack's unspeakable surprise. The Armstrongs had never been much given to endearments, and save the kiss his mother bestowed on him when he went away, this was the only caress he could remember receiving from her. He was deeply touched, and kissed her again, whereupon she pushed him away, as though she had done something to be ashamed of.

"I am an owd madlin [maudlin] for crying because thou has come back," she said, wiping her eyes; "but I'm not as strong as I used to be."

"Why, what's the matter, mother?" asked Jack anxiously.

"Nay, I can hardly tell thee—age and care. But thou'll be hungry after thy long journey. Come into th' parlor, and have a bit o' summat."

"It's nearly tea time, and my father will be here directly," observed Nancy.

"Let us wait till he comes, by all means. It will be pleasant to have tea all together," says Jack. "Aren't Mark and Luke coming too?"

"Not to-night I think. They are very throng at th' shop, and Mark and Luke will be sleeping there."

"Sleeping at the shop?"

"At the old house, I should say."

"So we have two houses?" exclaimed Jack, now more mystified than ever.

"Thou may well be surprised," said his mother. "Ay, we have two houses. The lads come home but two or three times a week, and they've a woman to wait on 'em, and we have two servants here, and lazy hussies they are."

"I say, John, let's have a bit of fun," interrupted

Nancy, by way, probably, of changing the subject. "My father will be here in a few minutes. Go into the drawing room, and when he comes I will say there's a gentleman waiting for him, and we'll see whether he knows you."

Another surprise for the youth. His sister not only called him John (as his mother had always done), but she no longer "thoud" him. Moreover, she spoke fairly good English, and only occasionally dropped or misapplied the aspirate.

"Certainly. It will be a good joke," he replied. "But I must fetch my box and things, which I left in the avenue, or they will tell a tale."

Nancy said she should go with him.

"What does it all mean?" he asked, when they were out of the house. "Is the shop coining money, or has my father invented a process for transmuting pig iron into gold ingots?"

"Nay, it isn't the shop that has done it. But there isn't time now, and I dare say my father would liefer tell you himself. And we must look sharp. He may be here any minute."

Jack carried his box to the house, and was going to take it upstairs, when his mother intervened.

"Not i' them shoon," she said sharply.

"Why, what's the matter with my shoes?" he inquired.

"It's a new stairs carpet," whispered Nancy.

Jack smiled and doffed his shoes, performed his task, and donned them. Nancy showed him into the drawing room. It was a spacious, and as might seem, well furnished apartment, but as the furniture was shrouded in chintz covers and the blinds were half down, it looked gloomy and dim.

Jack seated himself in a chair with his back to such light as there was and presently a crunching of gravel under the window, followed by footsteps in the porch, told him that his father had arrived. Then the front door opened, and there was a short colloquy between Matt and his daughter.

"A gentleman wants to see me," says he. "What's his name?"

"He didn't tell me his name, but he looks as if he came from foreign parts," says she.

"Dash it, I hope as he isn't a Frenchman. Why the deuce didn't he go to th' shop? I'll see him, of course—and get shut on him as soon as I can. I want my tay."

As Matt entered Jack rose from his chair, and made a low bow, which his respected parent returned, though by reason of the stoutness of his body and the stiffness of his joints, not very gracefully.

"*Est ce que j'ai le plaisir de parler*," began the son.

"Oh, dash it all, cannot you talk? I don't know a word of French—not a word," interrupted the father.

"I demand pardon. I speak a leetle English, and understand her vary well."

"Come, that's some bit like, though I don't quite understand what you mean by her. What can I do for you, mister?"

"Fortinbras is my name, and business my aim. But I fear I make a mistake in coming here. I tell the driver to conduct me to Mr. Armstrong, and he conduct me to your house instead of your fabrique."

"That does not matter a bit, Mr. Fortinbroo. You are wanting machinery, I reckon."

"It is so. Ze entire, what you call plant, for a loom fabrique of five hundred."

"Well, we can fit you up better than any other shop i' th' town. Have you brought a specification with you?"

"*Diable!*" exclaimed Jack, feeling in his pockets. "I regret very much, but I have left ze specification in my room at ze Ole Bull, where I stay. But to-morrow I shall bring it to your fabrique."

"That will be aw reyt, Mr. Fortinbroo, and we'll estimate as low as we can consist wi' good work, and we do nowt else. I'm expecting a son of mine from France to-morrow or Friday, and he'll be able to talk to you in your own language."

"I shall be delighted to make the acquaintance of Monsieur your son," said Jack, rising as if to take his leave.

"I have not seen him for going on five years," said Matt, also rising. "His education has cost me a sight o' money. But I think it has been well laid out, and I don't begrudge it."

"Thank you for saying so, father! I thank you with all my heart, and I hope you will always be of the same opinion."

Matt dropped back in his chair as if he had been shot.

"Our Jack, and I took him for a Frenchman!" he exclaimed, as soon as he had recovered his breath. "Nancy's at the bottom of this, I'll be bound. It's just like one of her manks. Turn thy face toward th' window and let's have a gradely look at thee. Bless me, how thou has grown, and thou art as brown as a berry. Signs of a beard, too! No wonder I wor taken in. Well, I am fain to see thee back, lad. Who towd thee we had flitted here? Owd Bottlenose. I reckon thou wor a bit surprised. Well, I haven't fun a gowd mine, but I've had a stroke of luck, gradely luck. We'll talk about it

after bagging. Come on, I'm hungry. But just one question:"—here Matt dropped his voice to a whisper—"Has thou seen or heard owt more o' that wastrel?"

"You mean Uncle Paul?"

"Don't say uncle. I wouldn't own him at no price."

"I have neither seen him nor heard aught of him since that time at Ashcombe."

"That's so much to the good. But he is sure to turn up sooner or later, like a bad shilling; and bithmon, I don't care how late it is, for he is gradely nowt, and will give somebody a lot of trouble."

"What has he done, and where has he been all this time?"

"I'll tell thee all about it one o' these days. But keep a still tongue, whatever thou does. Not a word to anybody, not even to thy mother or brothers."

Jack promised loyal observance of his father's injunction, and the two went to their bagging.

CHAPTER IX.

THE "bagging" was an uncommonly high tea; for the man of the house, a hearty feeder, generally came home hungry, and Nancy, who on this occasion had the "ordering," provided more plentifully than usual by way of celebrating Jack's return. There were chops, steaks, kidneys, sausages, and fried potatoes, hot toast and crumpets, jam tart, and an apple pasty. Not deeming these dainties enough, Matt, who was in high feather, ordered rum, and insisted on putting a few spoonfuls in the cups of every member of his family then present.

"Here's luck to thee, lad," he said as he raised his cup to his lips. "Gradely good, isn't it?"

Jack pulled a wry face. He thought rum and tea about the nastiest mixture he had ever tasted.

While the feasting was going on, his father "put him through his facings" in French.

"What's buttered toast i' French, Jack?" he asked.

"*Pain roti au beurre,*" answered Jack promptly.

"And crumpets, what's crumpets?"

Jack was by no means sure, but he thought he should not be far out in answering "*Gateaux.*"

Then came a poser. He had finished his first helping of chops.

"Come on, lad, back up thy cart and let me fill it ageean," said his father, using a metaphor greatly relished by coal carters. "What's that i' French?"

"It is too Lancashire to be easily translated into French," answered Jack, "but a fair rendering would be, "Allons, mon fils, renvoie ton assiette, et je to donnerai une autre portion."

"I think thou'll do. Thou seems to have it at thy finger's ends, and when Mr. Fortinbroo comes to-morrow with his order for looms thou'll be able to talk to him in his own lingo," rejoined Matt, laughing hugely at this own joke.

When tea was over he proposed an adjournment to the "house part," a quaint old room which had once served as the farmhouse kitchen, and still bore traces of its former destiny. The ceiling, from which depended a bread cratch, was low, the fireplace wide, and flanked with an oven and a boiler, the floor partly covered with cocoanut matting, while the walls were merely colored.

Matt had confided to his son that he felt more at home in the old kitchen than anywhere else in the house.

"So does thy mother," he added. "Hoo worrits terrible, and there's allus rows going on with th' lasses. Hoo gets 'em chep, and willn't be persuaded as a good servant willn't work for low wages. However, hoo'll larn i' time, I reckon. Th' house is her job, th' shop's mine."

He seated himself in a capacious and very comfortable armchair, and rested his slippered feet on the polished fender.

"Now, let us see what thou has larned at school beside French," said Mr. Armstrong, as he lighted a long clay pipe. "How many square yards is there in 439 statute acres? Here's a pencil. Thou can figure it out on th' back of this envelope."

"Thank you, I don't need the envelope; 2,081,200," answered Jack, after a moment's pause.

"That's sharp," said his father admiringly, "but now I think on't, thou were allus good at ciphering. Now, at sixpence a yard that comes to——"

"Fifty-two thousand and thirty pounds."

"Well, that's what I'm worth, independent of th' shop; it comes to a nice penny, and I got it by opening my mouth three times," observed Matt complacently.

Which made Jack open his eyes very wide.

"Got fifty thousand pounds by opening your mouth three times," he exclaimed. "You are joking, father."

"Nay, I'm not. I never spoke truer i' my life."

"But why didn't you open it three times more and make it a hundred thousand?"

"If thou'll howd thy noise I'll tell the aw about it, and then thou'll know. It's a longish yarn."

It was not only longish, but lengthened by several digressions on the part of the narrator and explanations demanded by his son, wherefore, instead of telling in Mr. Armstrong's words how he made a fortune by opening his mouth, I tell it in my own.

On the borders of the borough of Whitebrook was a piece of land, some four or five hundred acres in extent, known as Cobster Nook. It formed part of a considerable estate which had long been in Chancery, and as the parties to the suit were members of the same family it was fought with greater pertinacity than if they had been strangers, and bade fair to go on until the struggle was ended by the disappearance of the property.

Now Mr. Armstrong had decided views touching the eligibility of Cobster Nook as an investment or a speculation. Nearly the whole of the estate was potential building land. It lay between a railway and a canal, and was intersected by a brook which never ran

dry, and in a manufacturing district, where "condense water" is in demand, water privileges are valuable. More than once Matt had talked it over with his sons.

"There's a mint o' money in Cobster Nook. Onybody as could buy it reasonable mut make a fortune on't," he observed one day.

"Nobody can buy it, reasonable or unreasonable," growled Luke. "It's in Chancery, th' tenants cannot get answers to their letters, and th' buildings is going to wrack and ruin. Besides, you couldn't buy it, if it wor i' th' market. It will run into a lot o' brass, Cobster Nook will—fifty or sixty thousand belike."

"That wouldn't be chep, and I said if it could be bought chep."

Matthew had little hope of getting the estate, cheap or dear. He was not the man to ruin himself by stretching out his arm further than his coat sleeve would reach. Nevertheless, he could not get the idea out of his head, and when he happened to take a walk in the direction of Cobster Nook, which was pretty often, furnished it with roads, laid it out in building lots, and in imagination saw it covered with factories, shops, and dwellings. There were admirable sites for villas, also a good house in a grove of trees which it would be pleasant to live at; and Matt was beginning to think that the cottage by the foundry gates was hardly a suitable residence for a man of his means.

"I get no more pleasure out of my life than when I wor a journeyman," he reflected. "Bithmon, I believe I get less. I have more care, and it cannot be owt else than a pleasure to live in a nice roomy house with a bit o' a garden and a twothry trees, and a glimpse of green fields. Besides, it is good business. Customers think

better of a man as lives in a good house; so does th' hands; I could afford it, and I am sure th' lasses would like it."

But for the moment these were dreams. The good house at Cobster Nook was not available, and though the lasses were getting tired of Canal Cottage and its unsavory surroundings, their mother was not. Once, when Matthew had hinted at the expediency of a change, she asked him sharply where he could be better than close to his business, or live at less expense than where they were? For Mrs. Armstrong's ideal, an ideal to which she lived up, and tried to make her family live up, was to work hard and spend little.

Matthew could, of course, put his foot down as he had done when he took the foundry, and on other occasions, but it would be time enough for that when he was quite decided in his own mind and had found a suitable abode, since, albeit his ideas, like his means, were broadening, he was in no hurry to take a step which would increase his expenses and involve "words" with his wife.

But everything comes to the man who knows how to wait, and one fine morning, when Matt opened the *Whitebrook Standard* his eye fell on an advertisement which made him jump.

"In the matter of Rees *versus* Rees and others.
"By order of the Court of Chancery of the County Palatine of Lancaster.
"To be sold by auction.
"The Estate known as Cobster Nook."

Following which were particulars. The sale was to

take place a month later, at half-past seven or eight in the evening, in the Old Bull Assembly Room.

"That means they want money; and as the sale will be without reserve there may be a chance of getting it chep, and I could mortgage it for two-thirds or three-fourths of th' purchase price," thought Matthew, "and there's a fortune in it, I am sure there is."

But when he presently heard that Nathan Yates had said he meant to buy Cobster Nook his hopes of getting it—cheap or at all—went down to zero. The gentleman in question was a big brewer, "with no end o' brass," which he invested largely in public houses and real estate, and when he set his mind on buying a property, either at auction or by private treaty, he generally got it. There was no competing with him. If anybody bid against him he would run the price up to a fabulous figure and leave his opponent in the lurch. Now and then he was let in himself, but a few hundred or thousand pounds made little difference to him, and as they helped to establish his reputation as a man whom it was dangerous to oppose were well laid out.

All the same, Matthew went to the sale. In no happy mood, however. It vexed him to think that this brewer, already rich to repletion, would not let other folk have a chance.

"But Nathan shall not have it for nowt," he said to himself. "I'll run him up as far as I dare. But I shall have to mind. He'd ruin me as soon as look."

The day had been raw and gloomy, and as Matt trudged through the slushy streets snow fell thick and fast. It was not a night on which anybody would go out for pleasure, and even in the bar parlor of the Old Bull, though it was generally full at that hour, Matthew found

only a small gathering. After drinking and greatly relishing a glass of whisky and hot water, he went upstairs to the assembly room, where the auction was to take place. Though time was nearly up the room was not nearly full, and among those present Matthew saw none in whom Mr. Yates was likely to find serious competitors. There were two or three who might act as volunteer "sweeteners," just to keep Nathan from having it all his own way, but they were pretty sure to pause well on the hither side of danger, which made Matt all the more resolute to run the brewer up.

The Palatinate Court had been ill-advised in intrusting the sale to a Manchester auctioneer. A Whitebrooker would have had more influence and drawn more bidders. Moreover, the Manchester man, wanting to catch the ten o'clock train home, began the sale at eight sharp, instead of waiting till fifteen or twenty minutes past, as a local man would have done, or even longer if Nathan Yates had signified his intention of being present.

"Willn't you wait a twothry minutes for Mr. Yates? He is sure to come," demanded one of his tenants.

"Mr. Yates? Who is he?" asked the auctioneer. The question caused as much hilarity as a judge's joke.

An auctioneer who had never heard of Nathan Yates was an amusing curiosity.

Mr. Ray, the local solicitor, who acted as the Manchester lawyer's agent, and happened also to be Mr. Armstrong's solicitor, made a whispered communication to the auctioneer, whereupon the latter announced that he should wait till ten minutes past eight, adding however, that the concession was highly irregular and that in Manchester a sale always began punctually at the time advertised.

"What by that? Whitebrook's as good as Manchester any day," exclaimed an indignant native.

"Ay, and a darned sight better," shouted another.

The auctioneer, a stout, choleric-looking gentleman with a red face and a great expanse of white waistcoat, looked unutterable things, and presently glancing at his watch, said that time was up and he should make a start. After the usual exordium he asked for a bid.

"How much shall I say to begin with, gentlemen—twenty thousand pounds?"

The suggestion was greeted with a shout of derisive laughter.

"Ten thousand, then? Remember the sale is without reserve, and the estate one of the most unique and desirable it has ever been my lot to offer."

A teetotal grocer in a large way of business, who sat near Matthew, nodded affirmatively.

"Thank you! Ten thousand is bid. Any advance on ten thousand pounds?"

"Five hundred more," said the landlord of the St. Leger, and the bidding went briskly on, the prices offered being so far below the value of the estate, even at the lowest estimate, that none of the bidders ran the slightest risk of being "let in."

Meanwhile Matt was in a fever of suppressed excitement. The brewer was either presuming on the sale not beginning till half-past eight, or had been delayed by some accident. In which case there was still a chance for the ironmaster. But as yet, though Mr. Armstrong was watching keenly and doing his best to keep cool, he made no sign. He feared little or nothing from the grocer, who, as he correctly presumed, had come with the intention of running Matthew Yates up because the

latter was a brewer, and brewers were people whom he hated. But Riding, the St. Leger man, one of Nathan's tenants, was a dark horse. He might have instructions to keep the ball going till his landlord appeared, or even to buy the estate for him, regardless of cost. Or more probably (for the brewer did not trust anybody more than he could help) Riding, knowing that Mr. Yates meant to come, and being anxious to curry favor with him, was bidding officiously—an opinion for which Matthew found confirmation in the small advances, never more (after his first bid) than a hundred pounds, which the St. Leger man offered, and his frequent glances toward the door.

When the figure had been run up to eighteen thousand pounds, there ensued a pause, and the auctioneer's hammer was in the air, when Matt said quietly, "Eighteen five."

The St. Leger man looked at the door, then at the auctioneer, and said, "Eighteen six."

"Nineteen thousand pounds," said Matthew, in a loud, resolute voice, which drew upon him general attention.

Again the St. Leger man, after an anxious glance at the door, nodded his head.

"Nineteen thousand one hundred is bid. Any advance on nineteen thousand one hundred?" cried the auctioneer.

"Nineteen thousand five hundred!" shouted Matthew, as resolutely as before.

"Nineteen thousand five hundred is bid. Any advance on nineteen thousand five hundred? It is giving the property away, gentlemen, really giving it away. One of the finest properties it was ever my lot to offer.

Any advance on nineteen thousand five hundred? Another hundred?"—to the St. Leger man.

But this time the St. Leger man, after yet another glance toward the door, shook his head negatively, instead of nodding it affirmatively. Nathan was evidently not coming, had probably changed his mind, and Riding had no wish to get himself into a hobble.

"At nineteen thousand five hundred," repeated the auctioneer, "going at nineteen thousand five hundred; at nineteen thousand five hundred pounds!"

Down went the hammer and up went Matt's spirits. He had dished the brewer and made a fortune.

"Name?" asked the clerk, who was also from benighted Manchester.

"Matthew Armstrong," chorused the crowd.

"Three cheers for Owd Belial!" shouted a stentorian voice at the back of the room, a sally that provoked a burst of laughter amid which the door opened and admitted a tall man in a shining mackintosh, a man with a somewhat long, high colored face, and an aquiline nose, and big sandy whiskers, moist with melted snow.

"You're too late, Mr. Yates. It's just been knocked down. You're kaled this time," cried several officious friends.

"Nonsense! It's only just gone half-past eight, and I should have been here sooner but for the snow," returned Mr. Yates hotly. "My horse balled and I had to get out and walk. Am I really to understand that the property has been sold?"—to the auctioneer.

"Undoubtedly. The hammer fell a minute before you came in."

"And yet you knew I was coming?"

"I was told so, and gave you ten minutes law, and as the bidding went on for twenty, you had practically half an hour."

"Well, I call it an infernal shame. I would have given more for the property than anybody else, and I protest against it as an unfair sale."

"You may protest as much as you like, sir," said the auctioneer severely, "but no sale could be fairer, and I will uphold it before any court in the country. The hammer fell to Mr. Armstrong's bid, and I declare him the buyer."

"At what price?"

"Nineteen thousand five hundred."

"Nineteen thousand five hundred! I would have given—— Why didn't some of you chaps—you Riding—keep the bidding going a bit longer? You knew I was coming."

"I did keep it going as long as I dared," said the St. Leger man sulkily.

"As long as you dared! Why, you might have given thousands more, and still made a thundering good bargain," rejoined Mr. Yates furiously. Then, turning to Matt, he said, with constrained politeness, "Can I have a word with you, Armstrong?"

The latter signified assent, and the two men retired to a corner of the room.

"What will you take for your bargain?" asked the brewer.

"I am not a seller," answered Matt.

"Come, now, I'll give you a thousand pounds."

"Nay, you willn't. Didn't you say just now as Riding might have given thousands more and still made a good bargain?"

"That was to give Riding a setting down; and when a man loses his temper he does not measure his words. How would two thousand do?"

Matthew shook his head.

"Three?"

"Haven't I told you as I'm not a seller?"

"You may tell that to the marines. Anybody as isn't a fool is ready to sell owt—in the way of property—at a price. What's yours?"

"I tell you again, I'm not a seller. I think a good deal more can be made out of this property by developing and dividing it than by selling it in one lot. However, if you'll make me an offer of twenty thousand pounds for my bargain, I'll consider about it, and let you know to-morrow."

"I'll see you hanged first!"

And with that the brewer turned on his heel, and went away in a rage.

Some of the onlookers, guessing what had happened, indulged in loud expressions of satisfaction. Nathan Yates was more envied than beloved, and it pleased them to see him withstood.

Matthew went up to the auctioneer, and "settled"—paying the deposit in a check on his bankers, got a receipt, and signed a preliminary contract.

This done, he went down to the bar parlor, which by this time was thronged with gossips and cronies, who were talking over the incidents of the sale. They received the hero of the evening with noisy congratulations on his purchase, wished him luck, and invited him to sit down.

"Won't you let us wet your bargain?" queried Peter Pickering, a gentleman with a rubicund face and a

husky voice, who was already "three sheets in the wind."

"Ay, will I!" responded Matt, who had never felt so "fleunt" in his life. "Glasses round for the company, waiter, and while they are being filled go into th' cellar and fot hoaf a dozen bottles of your best champagne."

CHAPTER X.

MATTHEW ARMSTRONG awoke next morning thirsty and triumphant. Yet his elation was tempered by a sense of regret. He rather feared that he had come home not quite sober, thereby breaking a promise made some time previously to Dr. Chorley to cease getting drunk for the supposed benefit of his health—or any other reason. The last thing he remembered was being brought to his own door by several members of the "company," who, after giving him three cheers, went away, singing, "For he's a jolly good fellow." Moreover, the treat had cost him dear, quite five pounds. On the whole, however, he did not think he had been more than "sharp fresh"; a chap did not buy an estate of land every day, and it would not have been lucky to miss wetting his bargain.

After quenching his thirst with a pot of ale, he betook himself to the "shop," and was "on the ground" before the clocks went six.

At breakfast time Matt told his family of the great bargain he had made. The lasses, seeing in the event a likelihood of social advancement, and living in a better house, were delighted, while Mark and Luke approved of the purchase as a promising speculation, and took pride in their father's craft and his victory over Nathan Yates.

Only Mrs. Armstrong struck a discordant note.

"Where's th' brass to come fro'? How art thou going to pay for it?" she asked.

"Well, we can spare five or six thousand out of th' business, and raise th' balance on mortgage—more if I want, as easy as tumbling out of a tree."

"That's borrowing, and them as goes a-borrowing goes a-sorrowing."

"Thou doesn't know what thou are talking about, Jane. If I can borrow money at four or five per cent. and make ten or fifteen on it, I shall borrow."

"And what 'll become of th' shop while thou are looking after Cobster Nook? It will want looking after, I reckon?"

"Of course it will; but it 'll not take all my time by a long way; and I can trust Mark and Luke, if thou cannot."

This was a home thrust. Mrs. Armstrong thought highly of her lads, had even been known to exalt them at their father's expense, and her answer was weak.

"Well, I hope thou willn't ruin us wi' thy land buying, that's all."

"I think thou said summat o' that sort when I took th' foundry, and thou art just as wide of th' mark now as thou were then," returned Matt quietly. "Beside, folk like us isn't easy ruined. At th' worst we should only be where we wor. Th' lasses can weave, and there isn't two better workmen in England than Mark and Luke. I dare say somebody would give me a bit of a job. We could addle as much as we spend now, and would not need to work half as hard. A chap always works harder for hissel' than for anybody else. That stands to reason."

"What's th' use o' saving, and toiling, and contriving as thou has done, then?"

"Because a chap with any spirit likes to get on, and when he has put his heart into a job feels as if he would rayther dee than be bet. Beside, a mon like me does a lot of good. If I hadn't taken th' foundry and increased it, and built machine shops out o' my profits and savings instead of fooling them away, and made a name as brings us orders fro' foreign parts, Whitebrook would have been poorer this minute by nearly four hundred pounds a week in nowt but wages, and four hundred pounds a week will fill a good twothry bellies. And now I have bought Cobster Nook, and I am going to do some good with it both for ourselves and others. Anyhow, there's no use talking. Th' die's cast, as I said when I took th' foundry."

Mrs. Armstrong knew what this meant, and ceased her cavilings. In her heart the good woman was by no means ill pleased with her husband's enterprise, but she foresaw that one of the results would be the removal of the family from the place where they had thriven, to a "fine house," a prospect which she regarded with strong aversion, as much because she feared it might bring them ill luck as that it would increase their expense and their cares.

An hour or two later Matthew was in the fitting shop, inspecting some looms that were about to be dispatched to a Continental customer when a letter marked "Private," and directed to "M. Armstrong, Esq.," was put into his hand.

"Somebody hollow here," thought the addressee, as he opened the missive. It was not yet the custom of Whitebrook to style men "Esq." indiscriminately, and whenever Matthew received a letter which so described him, he distrusted the writer's sincerity, and put himself on his guard against possible wiles.

The letter was from Nathan Yates and began "Dear Mr. Armstrong;" another suspicious sign. It ran thus:

"I write to apologize for my hastiness of last night. My temper is naturally short, and when you opened your mouth so wide I lost it entirely. [Mr. Yates meant his temper, not Mr. Armstrong's mouth.] Of course you were not serious. Still, having bought the property cheap, you are entitled to a fair profit, and I am prepared to mend my offer by two thousand pounds. That is, I will give you eight thousand pounds for your bargain, clear of all expenses, provided you let me have an answer, 'Yes' or 'No,' in the course of the day."

This made Matt put on his considering cap. He had not been serious in asking twenty thousand pounds for his bargain. It was merely another way of saying he would rather keep the property than part with it; so enamored had he become of it, so bitten with the pride of possession that present profit was almost beside the mark.

Nevertheless, ten thousand pound of "found money" was not to be refused lightly—ten thousand pounds because, reading between the lines of the brewer's letter Matthew felt pretty sure that he would spring another two thousand pounds rather than miss getting what he wanted.

It would be a disappointment not to become the owner of Cobster Nook. On the other hand, with ten thousand pound additional capital, he could build another machine shop, employ additional hands, and greatly increase his gains, while the development of Cobster Nook would take money out of the concern, and the concern must not

suffer, whatever happened. These were considerations which Matthew had not sufficiently weighed, and as he put it to himself: "There are two ends to a stick, break it as often as you will." Another way of saying there are two sides to a question.

After long thought he put the letter in his pocket and went to see his bankers, Pyler, Heap & Co. They had always dealt liberally with him, were in some sense the guardians of his credit, and it was only right that they should know of the new venture in which he had engaged.

It happened to be the day of the senior partner's visit of inspection to the Whitebrook branch, and Matthew no sooner entered the bank than he was informed that Mr. Pyler would like to see him, and he was presently shown into that gentleman's room.

"I am glad to see you," said he, turning from his desk and doffing his spectacles. "I thought you would call, and told the clerks to let me know. You are a bold man, Armstrong."

"You have heard, then?" quoth Matt, with a movement of surprise.

"I have heard that you bought Cobster Nook at last night's sale," rejoined the banker, trifling with his glasses and eyeing Matt with his keen, gray eyes. "Before a tradesman becomes a landowner it behooves him to have a balance at his banker's. At least, I should think so. But you have perhaps a big deposit at some other bank?"

Thus sharply reminded that the check he had paid the night before overdrew his account by some fifteen hundred pounds, Matt grew hot all over, and exclaimed hurriedly:

"Nay, any, Mr. Pyler, you know me better than that,

and as for th' overdraft, you've let me have a good deal more than fifteen hundred, as you know well, and next week th' boot will be on th' other leg. You think I've been too venturesome. Well, I'll tell you aw about it."

Which he did, and when he had put the banker in possession of the facts, showed him the letter he had received from Nathan Yates.

It was fortunate for Armstrong that Mr. Pyler did not like Yates, the brewer having recently removed his account to a rival bank, which offered him a quarter per cent. more interest on his deposit than Pyler, Heap & Co. were allowing him.

"That shows as I was not far wrong in buying Cobster Nook, and I should like to keep it," observed Matthew, "but if you advise me to take Nathan's offer, I will, though I dare say, judging from th' way he butters me up, he would give a bit more."

"Well, it's a safe rule for a tradesman not to go into outside things. Yet there are exceptions, and this seems to be one. I think you are over-sanguine as to the value of this estate, and it will take much longer to develop it than you think. But there can be no question that it is worth more to Yates than to anybody else. Don't you know why?"

"Nay, I cannot say as I do," replied Matt, after a few moment's hard, albeit abortive, thinking.

"No! You are not as sharp as I thought you, Armstrong."

Which made Matt feel rather small, though, in point of fact his native shrewdness was quite equal to his banker's, only, unlike the banker's, it had not been bettered by education and knowledge of men.

"Yates is building a big house, isn't he?"

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"A w'opper, and nobody knows what for, him as has always lived on the cheap, and owns neither chick nor child."

"A rich man's whim; we are all apt to have whims, and Nathan may be contemplating matrimony. The house is near a part of the estate you have bought, isn't it?"

"Ay! there's only a road between his grounds and my land, and it's good building land just there, too."

"So whatever you might build there—a row of factory cottages and a beerhouse, for instance—would be opposite his lodge gates."

"Reyt opposite."

"So I have been told. That's the secret of his anxiety to buy your bargain."

"A row of cottages and a pub. wouldn't hurt him."

"Perhaps not. But you cannot argue with sentiment, and for my part I sympathize with him. How would you like to have a row of factory cottages and a beerhouse opposite your lodge gates?"

"I have no lodge gates."

"But if you had?"

"Well, I know nowt about what you call sentiment, but seeing as I have lived in a factory cottage and kept a beerhouse, it would ill become me to object to th' sight of 'em, 'specially at a distance."

"That's your sentiment, the other is Yates', and it is for you to turn it to account. You have asked for my advice and I suppose you mean to follow it?"

"I do. You have a wiser head than me."

"At any rate an older one, and I dare say I know more of the vagaries of human nature than you do. Here is my advice. Answer the letter at once. Say

that you decline to dispose of your bargain, but that as soon as you are in possession you might treat with him for a part of it. When he approaches you on the subject again, as he is sure to do, offer him a fourth of your purchase, including, of course, the frontage he covets, at the price you have paid for the whole, or even a little more. If you are hard he will yield, and you will get a fine estate for nothing, or less than nothing, and be able to develop it without starving your business. All you need do is to bring your deeds here and we will let you have what money you want for the purpose."

"It's a fine scheme. Didn't I say you had a longer head than me? I should never ha' thought of it," exclaimed Matthew admiringly. "But there is one thing."

"What?" asked Mr. Pyler, seeing that Matt hesitated.

"This here. I couldn't pay th' balance, about twelve thousand, without raising as much on mortgage and unless I pay cash down I cannot get th' deeds."

"Draw on us. It will be quite enough if you lodge the deeds when you get them. We will open a special account for your purchase—'Mr. Armstrong's Estate Cap account'—and debit it with the check we have just paid for the deposit. Let every tub stand on its own bottom."

"Thank you, Mr. Pyler; thank you kindly. You are proving a gradely friend, and may be sure I shall do as you say," said Matt warmly, and he went away with his rugged face wreathed in smiles and his heart full of gratitude for the banker's shrewd advice and unexpected liberality. A feeling, however, which reflection failed to sustain. Bankers did not give "owt for nowt," as Matt put it to himself. Mr. Pyler had not been kind

out of sheer good nature. He wanted to serve Nathan Yates out for taking his account away, and if his anticipations were realized he would get ample cover as well for the concern's overdraft as for whatever was likely to be required for developing purposes. Moreover, developing meant increasing the value of the estate, and, therefore, the bank's security.

So Matthew concluded that though the proposed arrangement would suit him well, he was not nearly so much beholden to Mr. Pyler as he had imagined, and the more he thought about it the less he liked the scheme which that gentleman had conceived. It did not seem quite jannock to force Nathan Yates to buy a fourth of the estate at treble its value by threatening to build opposite his lodge gates, and he doubted whether he should have the conscience to make so exorbitant a demand.

But before Matt could settle the point to his satisfaction he received a communication from his solicitor which gave him something else to think about. It was to the effect that Mr. Yates had formally impeached the validity of the sale, and until the question was disposed of the court would not proceed with the conveyance.

CHAPTER XI.

Mr. Yates was worsted and the sale confirmed, yet not until he had kept Armstrong on the tenter-hooks of suspense for several weeks and given him an infinity of worry. Matt, thinking no more about "jannock," vowed that if Nathan wanted any land of his he would make him pay; and was no sooner in possession of the estate than he advertised tenders for the erection of a loom shed, a beerhouse, a bone-boiling concern, and a row of factory cottages, on land directly opposite Mr. Yates' gates and grounds.

These impending horrors brought the brewer straightway to his knees. He sent his agent to inquire of Matthew what he would take for so many square yards of land fronting the road which ran between their respective properties.

"It isn't a question of square yards," answered Matt curtly. "I shall sell no less than fifty acres,—you may pick 'em where you will,—and my price is nineteen thousand pounds."

The agent pulled a face as long as a fiddle.

"God bless me, Mr. Armstrong! Why, that's what you gave for the whole boiling," he exclaimed.

"What's that to do wi' it? Suppose I had got it a gift, would it follow as I should make Mr. Yates a present on it? He got some of his property for nowt, but I never heard of him giving any away—or much else. Anyhow, them's my terms—for to-day only. To-morrow my price

will be nineteen thousand seven hundred pounds, and th' day after nineteen thousand eight hundred pounds, so you had better make up your minds sharp."

The agent went away to consult his principal, and, presently returning, offered fifteen thousand pounds, which Matthew not very respectfully declined, whereupon Mr. Yates' representative sprang another thousand, and this being also declined he had to consult his principal a second time. Before matters were arranged he had to consult him a good many times, for the brewer fought as though his life were at stake, and beyond eighteen thousand refused to budge.

"If Armstrong won't take that let him build as many beerhouses and bone-boiling shops as he likes, and be hanged to him," said he. "They won't depreciate my property to the tune of nineteen thousand pounds, and I can build a high wall between his land and mine, and put my lodge gates somewhere else."

Here was a fix. Matthew had vowed that he would not take less than nineteen thousand pounds, and now Nathan protested that he would not give more than eighteen thousand pounds, and it looked as though he were in earnest. From this difficulty Matthew extricated himself by a happy thought.

"Let Mr. Yates give me Pye Nest to boot, and I'll say done," he told the agent. "But he'll have to throw th' furniture in, for it's only an owd farmhouse, and not much bigger than a cottage. Then we shall both be as good as our word. He can say as he has not gan no more than eighteen thousand pounds, and I can say as I've getten my price—though it 'll be stretching my conscience a goodish bit. Pye Nest is not worth more than a thousand."

"It's worth two," said the agent, which was probably as much an exaggeration one way as Matt's was the other. However, the proposal was accepted, and when Nathan Yates removed to his new mansion, the Armstrongs flitted to his old home.

"Clever father to get the better of so astute a gentleman as Nathan Yates!" exclaimed Jack, when Matthew had told his story. "He richly deserved to be squeezed. But you have made a bitter enemy of him, haven't you?"

"Well, we are not so thick, and I dare say he'll do us an ill turn if he can. But I wouldn't mind making a twothry more enemies at the same price. Ay, he was terrible mad, and used bad language. I heard of him saying as it was not so much being made to pay through the nose as vexed him, as being bested by a d——d illiterate ironfounder."

"He said that, did he?—the insolent upstart! What an infamous slander!"

"Nay, hardly that. They tell me as illiterate means no scholar, and I am no scholar—there's no getting o'er that. All th' same, I don't think I'm more likely to be d——d than he is, though he does go to church regular."

"But the idea of a man who has made his fortune out of beer affecting to look down on an iron-founder!"

"Don't thee say owt against beer, lad. If I hadn't saved a bit o' summat when I kept th' Harmony, I couldn't ha' taken th' foundry, and if I hadn't taken th' foundry thou would ha' been a 'prentice molder this minute. Beer isn't a bad thing when a chap doesn't let it get th' mayster on him."

This rather abashed Jack. Though he might dislike Nathan Yates for speaking ill of his father, he could not

consistently despise him for being a brewer. The fortunes of both families were based on malt liquor.

"Ay, I made a middling good bargain," added Matthew complacently. "And th' result is satisfatory. Th' property is doing well. I've sold a good lump on chief; I'm building two loom sheds for other folks on a percentage, and have got orders to fill 'em wi' machinery. One way and another, I shall make a profit equal to sixpence a square yard, which as thou reckoned up just now comes to fifty thou. And yet thy mother found fault wi' me!"

"Found fault with you! What on earth for?"

"For not getting more out of Nathan. Hoo says that if I had been hard he would ha' gan me all I asked, in cash. I don't think so. I had wound him up to th' top pitch, and I was lucky in getting Pye Nest, which between me and thee is worth nearer two thousand than one. But mother did not want to come here, and has never been content sin' we did. Hoo worrits about all day long, polishing chairs, and scrubbing floors, and driving th' servants to that end as none never stops wi' her more than six week or two months."

"Poor mother! I am sorry she is not happy."

"Hoo'll get used to it i' time; and use, they say, is second nature."

Here the door opened, and Nancy announced in a stage whisper that Mr. and Mrs. Clinchworthy were in the dining room.

"The deuce they are!" exclaimed the man of the house. "It isn't oft as they favor us with a call. What's up, I wonder? Come on, Jack."

And with that father and son betook themselves to the dining room.

"Well, Jimmy lad, how goes it?" said Matthew, as he and the gentleman in question shook hands, a style of greeting which "Jimmy lad" did not seem greatly to admire, albeit Matt and himself had been lads together. The contrast between them was too striking to escape the observation of so sharp a youth as John Armstrong. His father in slippers, an easy-fitting old house coat, a collarless shirt, and knotted necktie, his hair touseled, and several buttons of his waistcoat undone. Clinchworthy in a black coat of faultless fit, a satin stock with a gold pin, and the tight-fitting, tightly-strapped trousers of the period, his rather scant hair well brushed and pomaded, himself well groomed.

The ex-molder, despite his rise in life, was still essentially a Bohemian, careless of convention, and unambitious of social distinction, whereas the ex-hand-mule spinner had bloomed into a Philistine of the first water, was an alderman, a J.P., and a leading man at Charles Street chapel, cultivated popularity as a fine art, and, as was rumored, aspired to still higher honors. No wonder that he did not like to be addressed as "Jimmy."

"I'm very well, thank you, Matthew, and hope you are the same," he answered stiffly. "And this young gentleman?"

"Our Jack, just come home fro' France."

Whereupon Jack had to shake hands with Mr. and Mrs. Clinchworthy, the latter of whom was very affable, and asked him many questions about his life at Ashcombe, and his sojourn in foreign parts.

Meanwhile Matthew did not forget the duties of hospitality.

"Ring for glasses and water, and fot th' bottles,

Nancy," said he to his daughter, who, after ringing the bell and giving the order, produced three decanters from the sideboard.

Mrs. Clinchworthy was first asked what she would take, and, after some pressing, consented to take a glass of gin, on condition that Mrs. Armstrong joined her.

"Whisky?" said Matthew, addressing Clinchworthy, and pushing the bottle toward him. "I thought so. You always took kindly to whisky. It 'll not be th' fost time by a long way that you and me has cracked a glass together, will it? Do you remember what a spree we had at Th' Owd Legs o' Man, i' Preston, when you paid your footing as spinning master, and reyt fluent you wor o'er it too. What did you sing—'My delight, on a shining night, the season of the year,' wasn't it?"

Matt delighted to "trot" his ancient comrade, who, as he thought, was getting too proud and precise.

Clinchworthy looked desperately uneasy. He did not enjoy these allusions to old times.

"Those were unregenerate days, Matthew. Let us say no more about them," he observed, in a tone between regret and reproach. "We have just been to a missionary meeting."

"A missionary meeting! Where?"

"At Mellor. What should have been a missionary meeting, I should say. I was in the chair, but as the missionary did not come—missed his train, I suppose—the meeting missed fire. So we thought we would come on here, and ask you to come to our school sermons next Sunday. We are having Dr. Hornblow, from London, the most eloquent preacher of the denomination. The John Street people tried to get him for their school sermons, but we were beforehand with 'em, or rather I

was, for I went up to London express, and hard work I had to persuade him, I can tell you. He has engagements without end. You will come, won't you? Also Mrs. and Miss Amrstrong, and your son John? It will be a great treat to hear Dr. Hornblow."

"Will it?" put in Matthew dubiously. "What does thou say, Jane?"

"There will be two services morning and evening. After evening service we are having a few friends to supper, and shall be glad if you will come too, all of you," added Mrs. Clinchworthy, in her most winning way.

"Well, I think th' evening service will suit me best, and if th' wife's willing, we'll come," said Matthew slyly.

Mrs. Armstrong, who could not abide fine folk, and did not like leaving her house in charge of servants, even for a few hours, declined, but being unable to refuse Mrs. Clinchworthy's: "Do come, dear Mrs. Armstrong, we shall be so glad to see you!" let herself be persuaded. To her husband's surprise, for suspecting that the invitation was actuated rather by a desire to swell the collections than solicitude for his spiritual welfare, Matthew would have been better pleased had his wife, by declining, given him a plausible excuse for staying at home.

There were two important independent chapels at Whitebrook between which, as touching their architectural pretensions, the extent and wealth of their congregations, the merits of their ministers, and the efficiency of their Sunday schools, there existed so perfect an equality that rivalry was only possible in regard to the amounts collected at their respective Sunday school sermons. Both could boast of taking more money on these occa-

sions than any other church or chapel in the town, and there was great striving as to which of them should win the palm of liberality. Sometimes Charles Street prevailed, sometimes John Street. Latterly, however, John Street had scored the oftenest. Hence, Clinchworthy, who worshiped at what Matt irreverently called "t'other shop," was naturally anxious to redress the balance, and if the race were close a few sovereigns from the Armstrongs might turn the scale.

However, as Mrs. Armstrong had consented, there was no backing out, so turning to Clinchworthy, Matt observed pleasantly:

"All right, Jimmy lad, we'll come; and thank you and th' missis kindly for asking us. I hope there'll be a good collection."

"I think there will be, Matthew. I think we shall top John Street this time. Dr. Hornblow is sure to draw a large congregation, and we are all going to do our best. And now I want to speak to you about a little matter of business."

The little matter of business concerned a site for a chapel and schoolhouse, which the John Street and Charles Street people proposed to build at Cobster Nook for the benefit of their poorer co-religionists who dwelt in that locality.

"I'll meet you liberal. Five years for nowt, then a lease for nine hundred and ninety-nine at fourpence a yard," responded Matt promptly.

"That seems reasonable. Well, I'll report it to the joint committee, of which I am chairman, and let you know as soon as we have come to a final decision, which I dare say will be in the course of a month or so."

On this Mrs. Clinchworthy suggested that it was time

they were going. They had left their brougham in the road, and the horses might be getting cold.

"We'll walk to th' gate an' see you off," said Matthew, and all except Mrs. Armstrong went out. Nancy and Clinchworthy going first, his wife, Armstrong, and Jack a few paces behind them. As they were halfway between the house and the gate Mrs. Clinchworthy missed her pocket handkerchief, and asked Jack to run back and see whether she had dropped it in the hall or left it in the dining room, with which request he promptly complied.

"Have you heard anything more—of him?" she asked Matthew, in an anxious whisper.

"Nowt."

"And your son—what a promising young man he seems—is he aware—does he suspect? You know what I mean."

"He is aware nowt except that the wastrel as did him out of a shilling and robbed the schoolmaster was Paul Armstrong."

"And you will tell him nothing more? Neither him nor anybody else? Promise me, Matthew, for old times' sake."

"I promise that I'll tell neither him nor anybody else—except in your own interest. There is no telling what may happen, and it may be necessary to take somebody else into our confidence."

"You will help me, then? You will be my friend? Thank you, Matthew. They say you are a rough diamond, but you have a good heart."

"All very fine, Susan, but you didn't show yourself very friendly one while."

"Was it altogether our fault, Matthew? How could

we call upon you when you lived at that horrid beerhouse?"

"Horrid beerhouse! It did not do ill for me, anyhow, and if I had kept th' Bull instead of th' Harmony, or been a mayster instead of a workman, I guess you would ha' made it i' your way to look us up. However, we'll say no more about that. I am not one as bears malice, and we are good friends now."

Here the colloquy was interrupted by Jack, who brought Mrs. Clinchworthy her pocket handkerchief. She thanked him graciously, and expressed a hope that they might see him often at Brookfield House, adding: "You know my son Frank, of course?"

"Only by sight."

"Well, you must make his acquaintance, and I hope you will become excellent friends. He is only three or four years your senior, and has been well educated."

When Matthew and his children returned to the house, Mrs. Armstrong inquired with some asperity why he had offered to let "them folk" have a building site rent free for five years, and how much it would come to.

"If they take twelve hundred yards, as I dare say they will, it 'll come to twenty pounds a year, which, multiplied by five, makes one hundred pounds."

"That's a sight o' money to give away, Matthew."

"Middling, but it 'll be well laid out, lass. Th' Independents has good schools and a school or two on th' property will be a fine thing for th' neighborhood, and I should be both niggardly and foolish if I didn't offer 'em a bit of encouragement. Besides, if th' Independents build, th' Baptists and th' Methodists will be bound to build too. Last of all, th' Church folk will waken up and say: 'It 'll never do to let these Dissenters have

it all their own way at Cobster Nook. Let us build a brand new church and a nice school!' That will mean selling as much land on chief as will make me or somebody else a matter of two pounds a week for welly a thousand years. I would leifer let 'em sit rent free for ten years than it should miss; and I think we'll take a pew at Charles Street and go now and then. One good turn deserves another."

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER an early breakfast (seven sharp) father and son went to the shop, which as Matthew correctly observed, was not next door, as it used to be.

The elder brothers' reception of Jack, though doubtless meant to be kind, was neither demonstrative nor sympathetic.

"I am glad to see yo' back," said Mark, while Luke had no more to say than: "Well, yo've getten back," both addressing him, as he was quick to see, in the second person plural, instead of the second person singular, as they used to do, whether out of respect for his added years or because prosperity had insensibly modified their language Jack could not determine.

Then they began to "trot" him.

"Why, he is quite a gentleman! Look at his hands, they are as white as a woman's," quoth Mark, perhaps a little enviously.

"And he has getten a regular London twang," added Luke. "But now, as he has learned all as there is to learn he'll have to do some gradely work. What can we set him to, Mark?"

"How would it be if he were to set agate cleaning castings? We had a big blow last night."

"Or he might yoke Fiddler up and fot sand; we are using a good deal just now."

"Don't talk nonsense; I'm not going to put a race

horse between a cart's shafts," interposed their father, who did not appreciate these witticisms.

"Race horse!" exclaimed Mark. "We are as well bred as him, aren't we?"

"Well, I don't put you in th' shafts, do I?"

"Not now, but you have done."

"Nobbut when it was Hobson's choice. Jack's work will be mostly in th' counting-house an' outside. That's what he's qualified for, and you are doing what you are qualified for; so don't let us have no bother."

Whereupon Matthew led the way to the office, which, like nearly every other building on the premises, had been greatly enlarged since the youngest son's departure.

The morning's letters were opened, and their contents discussed, accounts overhauled, orders given, and a variety of other business transacted. Jack, who being not yet in the swim had to stand by, was much struck by his father's mastery of details, his skill as a mental calculator, the promptitude of his decisions, and the way in which he swayed everybody about him. Mark and Luke, though they supplied information and offered suggestions, never questioned their senior's rulings. And when Jack went round the foundry and machine shops and marked how much they had grown, the order that prevailed, the high quality of work that was being done, he came to the conclusion that Mr. Noble was not far wrong in setting ability to create great industries and manage men before scholarship and learning.

Later in the day the French teacher, who had been acting as the firm's interpreter and translator, appeared. Matthew introduced him to Jack in his own unceremonious fashion.

"My son John, as I have told you about; just come

home from France. This is M. Rat, as was born in France. Now let's hear you talk."

M. Rat, who had been so long in England that he spoke French with an English accent, shook hands with Jack, and said that he was delighted to make his acquaintance.

"French!" exclaimed Mr. Armstrong. "Talk i' French."

Which they did for full ten minutes, Jack displaying great readiness, to his father's delight, less so to that of the brothers, who were looking on somewhat enviously, for there is nothing that so much impresses the imperfectly educated as fluency in foreign tongues. True, Jack knew only one in addition to his own, but in the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king. Nor did Mark and Luke take altogether kindly to the idea of the lad, whom aforetime they had cuffed and contemned, being so much cleverer than themselves, with which apprehension was mingled a fear that Jack was going to be their father's favorite.

When the French talking was done, M. Rat, with emphatic gestures, informed Mr. Armstrong that his son spoke French admirably, and was quite competent to conduct the firm's French correspondence, which so pleased Matthew that, though he had given M. Rat notice that his services would not be required after the current week, he ordered the cashier to present the gentleman with a month's pay, and, sending for a cab, took Jack with him to Cobster Nook.

"It will do if thou gets into harness to-morrow," said he, and then told the young fellow how he desired him to dispose of his time. The mornings were to be spent in the counting-house, answering letters, French and

otherwise, and "getting an insight into th' books"; the afternoons in the fitting shop. "As thou'll have to talk to customers, and travel a bit, and quote prices, thou mun know every part of a loom, and how much different sorts costs. Th' same with winding engines and beaming frames, and whatever else we make. Learn all as thou can, for ten to one thou'll have to tak' th' lead, sooner or later. Mark and Luke haven't a lazy bone in their bodies, and they allus do as they are bidden, but they never seem to have any new ideas, and shirk responsibility. Their brains isn't coupled up like mine and thine. All th' same, I doubt whether education is such a grand thing as some folk think. A chap is as he is made, and if his head is right screwed on, he'll do. Look at Clinchworthy and me. We never had no schooling."

From which it is to inferred that prosperity was making Matthew egotistical, or that he belittled education out of an uneasy consciousness that he had not given his elder sons greater advantages in the way of schooling, as with his earnings he could have done. Or he might have desired to impress upon his youngest son the fact that in the battle of life character and capacity are more serviceable than mere book learning.

Cobster Nook was a scene of great activity; new buildings were springing up in all directions, and Jack had another opportunity of admiring his father's energy and enterprise, and the skill with which he managed great undertakings.

After a thorough inspection of the property father and son went home, where they found Mark and Luke, and the whole family took their evening meal together, the first time for many years. Then Matthew and the lads

betook themsleves to the "house part" and had a smoke and a "camp." Jack gave an account of his life at Ashcombe and his experiences in France, and his brothers, who were more genial than they had been at the shop, and his father told him many things about the business which it behooved him to know.

Before they separated for the night Nancy said she had invited a few friends to tea for the following evening, and asked her brothers to be at home not later than half-past six o'clock.

"Any young ladies?" demanded Luke.

"Yes, Carrie McAndrew and her brother Tom; Flossy Smith and Will, and Mlle. Hermance."

"Then I shan't come," he answered abruptly.

For though Luke could joke familiarly with a weaver, or pay court to a winder, he could not abide young ladies.

"Oh, yes, I know! You would rather be at the Old Bull or the Three Pigeons than spend a pleasant evening at home."

"It wouldn't be pleasant; it would be deuced unpleasant wi' that lot, being polite and talking fine and all that mack o' nonsense," growled the young man.

"Well, don't come if you would rather not. I dare say we shan't miss you much," returned his sister sharply.

"You will come, of course, Mark?"

"Of course. I shall be very glad."

Jack had already observed a greater difference between his brothers than had been obvious before he left them. Luke had deteriorated; he was growing fat, his coarse red face suggested that he drank more than was good for him; his manners were, if possible, ruder, and in his speech he affected the broadest Lancashire, garnished

with vulgarisms. Mark, on the other hand, had as distinctly improved. He was less abrupt in manner. Except that his "h's" had mostly to take care of themselves and his pronunciation was not precisely classical, he could speak with a fair approach to correctness, and occasionally made a remark which showed that he was becoming a reader and took an intelligent interest in other things than the shop and the town's gossip.

Jack had not expected much entertainment at Nancy's tea party, but the moment he set eyes on Mlle. Hermance his opinion changed. He was of an amorous disposition and at an impressionable age, and though he did not fall in love with her at first sight she took his fancy immensely, and he compared her with Miss Perkins, to that young lady's disadvantage. The Swiss girl's eyes were finer, her complexion was richer, and her slightly aquiline nose a nobler feature than Polly's *nez retroussé*. Moreover, she had sweet smile and splendid teeth (Polly's left something to be desired), and was especially gracious to Jack, whose fluency in French was greatly admired, save perhaps by Mark, who did not seem to be enjoying himself much.

After tea there was music, and Jack sang a song he had learned in France to Mademoiselle's accompaniment on the pianoforte. Then the young people got up a little impromptu dance, and John Armstrong danced with each of the young ladies in turn, Mark, who had no more idea of dancing than a polar bear, looking gloomily on.

The party broke up at half-past ten, and Mlle. Hermance was quite undone when she discovered that the servant who was to have fetched her home had not appeared.

"Oh, dear, what shall I do?" she cried distressfully.

"Let me take you home. I shall only be too happy," returned Jack gallantly.

The young lady answered with a deprecatory gesture. In her native Geneva the proposal had been almost an insult, and albeit she was getting used to English ways, doubted whether, even at Whitebrook half-an-hour's *tête-à-tête* with a young man on a dark night would be altogether *comme il faut*.

Miss Armstrong marked the hesitation and guessed its cause. "Mark will go as well, and then you will have two cavaliers, Lucie, dear," said she. And said Jack to himself, "What a deuced pretty name!"

"Lucie, dear," thinking that though one young man might be dangerous, she should be safe with two, acquiesced, and Nancy, turning to her brother, who had not heard the conversation, asked whether he would see Mlle. Hermance home.

"Gladly!" answered Mark, and a big smile rippled over his big honest face, but on being told that John was to be of the party, and that they would be "company back" he did not appear as pleased as might have been expected.

Miss Hermance was in high spirits, and so soon as the trio were under way began to discourse in French and went on until Jack hinted that his brother did not understand the language, whereon she apologized very prettily to Mark for her "impolitesse," saying it was so seldom she met anybody who spoke French "like Mr. John," that she quite forgot herself, and hoped he would not be vexed. Then, by way of making amends for her remissness she tried to get up a conversation with the elder brother exclusively, but as he either answered in mono-

syllables, or not at all, she concluded that he was vexed, and becoming vexed in turn, gave her attentions to Jack and kept on talking with him until they bade each other good-night at Miss Bland's door. During the return journey Mark was equally taciturn. After several abortive attempts to draw his brother into conversation, Jack gave it up as a bad job and himself relapsed into silence, wondering what on earth was the matter with "old Mark."

Jealousy was the matter. Mark had been eclipsed the entire evening—forced to take a back seat while his whipper-snapper of a brother with his French, his singing, and his capering had carried all before him. All of which Mark might have borne with resignation if not with patience, as being more or less in the nature of things: but that this lad, fresh from school, should have made more way with Lucie Hermance in a few hours than he had made in thrice as many months was exasperating. He had adored Lucie in secret since he first saw her, and striven by reading and study to render himself less unworthy of one whom he regarded as a prodigy of beauty and learning. But as he could not go to school again like his sisters (who were taking private lessons at Miss Bland's seminary), and was no genius, he found it hard work and despaired of ever making himself a scholar. Moreover, he was so shy that he had not ventured to breathe a word of love to Lucie, and so *gauche* that he knew not how to offer her any of those delicate attentions by which more adroit lovers disclose their passion before they open their lips.

Mark, raging inwardly, cursed his ill luck. Why had not his parents given him a schooling? Why was he not the youngest son instead of the eldest?

Why had his father sent Jack to Ashcombe and France and made him a gentleman? Why had God made Jack the cleverest and best-looking of the family, and why, oh, why, had Lucie that night been kinder to Jack than she had even been to him?

With these thoughts in his head it was no wonder that when Jack bade his brother a cheerful "good-night," as they went upstairs, Mark answered him with a muttered imprecation.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next day, being Sunday, the Armstrongs rose late, except Jack, who, so far as altered circumstances would allow, kept to the habits he had formed at Ashcombe, one of which was early rising on every day of the week, and Nancy, who had to superintend the preparations for breakfast.

The young fellow, whom Mark's more than rudeness had completely nonplussed, told his sister what had passed, and asked whether she could throw any light on the mystery.

"I have only just come home," said he, "and it would be a pity for us to begin falling out, but when you bid a fellow good-night and he answers, 'Hang your good-night,' it looks as though he wants to provoke a quarrel, and if any other fellow than Mark had said it I would have given him what for."

"Don't talk in that way, John, dear," returned Nancy earnestly. "I could not bear to think of you two quarreling, and anything of that sort would be a sore trouble to father and mother. Mark is older than you, and has not had your advantages, and it is your duty to bear with him."

"Oh, yes, I know that, and am quite willing to do it; but there are limits even to forbearance, and when a fellow says, 'Hang your good-night,' those limits are almost reached, especially when you are innocent of offense," replied Jack warmly.

"Unconscious of offense you may be, but I am not so sure about the innocence."

"You mean that I have riled old Mark without knowing it. Please tell me how, and I won't do it again."

"You got on very well with Mlle. Hermance?"

"Well, I rather think I did, and a very nice girl she is to get on with. But what has that to do with it? Mark and she are not engaged, and, judging from his manner last night he does not care a button for her. Hardly even spoke to her in fact, and after we left the house he was as grumpy as a bear with a sore head."

"Well, you must remember that you made yourself very agreeable to Lucie, anybody could see that you tried to please her. And what with your French, your singing, and your dancing you quite took the shine out of poor Mark, who can do none of these things. Quite enough to account for his grumpiness, especially if, as I suspect, he is in love with Mademoiselle."

"And she?" asked Jack rather anxiously.

"I am pretty sure she is not in love with him, while as for Mark he has not said a word. But he has changed. He is much more particular about the fit of his clothes than he used to be, never misses a chance of fetching me home when I go to Miss Bland's, and goes regular to the Parish Church, though he used not to go anywhere. I have been with him a few times, and he always chooses a place which commands a view of Miss Bland's pew. So putting two and two together——"

"You conclude that it is a case of spoons."

"On Mark's part."

"I understand. On Mark's part only. Well, I promise you that I shall do my best to give him no further cause for his absurd jealousy—only he must not use bad

language. I had enough of that when I was the shop slavey, and I shall not take any more of it from either of them."

"And you won't get it—at any rate from Mark. Give him a little time, and he'll come round, be sorry for his rudeness last night, and let you know it, though he may not say anything. He is kindlier and less rough of speech than he used to be, which is another reason why I think he is in love. Better still, he is true. If he gives his word, he will keep it—he is true and steady."

"And Luke isn't true and steady?"

"Well, I wouldn't say he isn't true; but I'm afraid he isn't steady."

"You mean he drinks. I thought so from his face."

"Hasn't my father told you anything?"

"Not about Luke."

"I am not surprised. He doesn't like talking about it. Yes, Luke drinks. He got above himself when father bought Cobster Nook, and begun to go into bad company. Then he sings a good song, and ability to sing has been the ruin of many a young man in Whitebrook. Sometimes, too, he goes to less respectable places than the Bull and the Bay Horse. It is one of the things that make my mother unhappy. She thinks that if we had stopped at Canal Cottage, Luke would have kept steady. I doubt it. He began to go wrong before we came here, though it was kept quiet. But don't let on as I told you. My father will be telling you himself one of these days, and if he does not, others will."

Jack understood now for what reason his father had said that, sooner or later, he would have to take the lead. Mark, though steady and trustworthy, was not equal to the task of managing a large concern, and Luke drank.

"This is bad news. I am very, very sorry," said he. "But can't something be done. Couldn't you and I do something?"

"By speaking to Luke? It has been tried, and seems only to make bad worse. You have no foothold with him. He won't admit that he does drink too much. He denies it point-blank, and if you contradict him gets into a rage, and sulks for days, and as likely as not goes on the loose."

"I did not think it was as bad as that. What can you do with such a man? I am afraid it is a hopeless case."

"So am I. But don't say so to anybody else, above all to father and mother. And now I want you to promise me something."

Taking both her brother's hands in hers, Nancy looked up at him with tear-dimmed eyes. She had a homely, yet pleasant, face, but at the moment it looked absolutely beautiful.

"I want you to promise me to be steady, and make yourself my father's right hand."

"Of course I shall be steady. What do you take me for, Nancy? As though I had any thought of being aught else!" replied Jack, with some heat.

"You have no such thought now, but you are very young, and are going to take a responsible position. You will be exposed to many temptations—more than you anticipate. So many young men go wrong. You don't know, Jack."

"And how do you know, Nancy?"

"I am older than you, dear, and we weren't brought up in a hothouse. Besides, one hears things, and Whitebrook is a dangerous place for young men whose fathers are rich, and my father is well off now. It would break

his heart if he thought the business was likely to be broken up, or pass into strange hands when he is gone. You see Jack, you are the hope of the family, and you will promise, won't you?"

"I don't think the promise is necessary, but as you ask it I will give it—to be steady and help my father all I can, and please God I shall be as good as my word. Now, are you satisfied?"

"Quite, and thankful. May I tell mother?"

"If you like—but why?"

"It will be a comfort to her. She is both proud of you and anxious for you, and, I'll be bound, has spent half the night thinking about you. All the same, you will sometimes find her queer and short-tempered. But never mind, mother's bark is worse than her bite. And you cannot expect a woman who has brought up a family in a small house and on small means—sometimes when my father has been out of work on no means at all—to keep her temper as sweet as a lady who is waited on hand and foot, and has never known a care. That is all I have to say—for the present," added Nancy, with a smile; "and now I must run away and see after breakfast. They will be down directly, and my father is very particular about his bacon."

A few minutes later Nancy's anticipation was realized by the appearance of the man of the house, followed at a short interval by Mrs. Armstrong and Mark, who answered Jack's cordial greeting with equal heartiness, from which, and his manner generally, Jack inferred that his brother regretted his late bearishness and bad language.

"Who is going to chapel to-neet?" asked Matthew, glancing at his eldest son, to which Mark replied that he thought there would be enow without him.

Matthew concurred, observing that, "Four of us and Jimmy's family will about fill his pew, and I shouldn't like to turn any of 'em out of it."

When the time came for the four to set off, he gave Mrs. Armstrong, Nancy, and Jack a sovereign apiece—for the "gathering."

"If I give as much it 'll come to four pounds, and that 'll be handsome," said Matthew.

"Too handsome by half," remarked his wife; "two pounds would be quite enough."

"Enough to give, happen, but not enough to keep Jim Clinchworthy in good humor, and that is what we are going for, isn't it?"

An argument which silenced, though it did not convice, Mrs. Armstrong.

They were received at the chapel door by the gentleman in question, who was acting as amateur verger, and appeared to be quite in his element. He led his visitors to the Clinchworthy pew, where they found Mrs. Clinchworthy, her son Frank, and one of her daughters, in a large, handsome pew, carpeted, luxuriously cushioned, lined with green baize, and well supplied with Bibles, hymn books, and hassocks.

"Well done, Jim! This is what I call comfortable," thought Matthew, as he settled himself in a cosy corner to which he had been waved by his old comrade.

As the last verse of the first hymn was being sung, Mr. Clinchworthy marched up the aisle, holding an open hymn-book in his hand and singing vigorously, and took a place beside his wife.

Dr. Hornblow justified his reputation. The sermon was long, eloquent, and effectively delivered, albeit a good many of his hearers found parts of it too deep for

their comprehension, but in the opinion of regular worshipers this obscurity was its greatest merit, the Charles Street people being so highly intelligent that they rather despised a preacher whom they were able to understand.

Matthew had much ado to keep awake, and several times yawned perceptibly and nodded ominously. As he subsequently observed, he was unused to sitting an hour "among a lot o' cushions wi' nowt to do and no pipe to smoke."

The sermon over, Dr. Hornblow made an appeal on behalf of the schools, and after announcing that the collection would now commence, gave out a hymn, whereupon Mr. Clinchworthy produced from under the seat a square baize-lined box with a long handle, and sallied forth to lend a hand in the work, beginning his quest at the end of the aisle, which was some distance from his own pew.

In the meantime Mrs. Armstrong, unable to reconcile her mind to parting with the sovereign which her husband had given her for the collection, and reflecting that nineteen shillings was enough to keep a poor man's family for a week, had resolved to give one shilling only, and apply the balance to some better purpose.

At the same time Matthew was mentally debating whether he had not better put two sovereigns into the box, and so bring up the family contribution to five pounds. Before he had decided this knotty point Mr. Clinchworthy entered the pew and offered the box to Mrs. Armstrong, who, being rather taken by surprise, gave her mite so clumsily as to attract attention, and it was seen by her husband and others.

"Godfrey Daniel, a bob, and I gave her a sov!" he

mentally exclaimed. "I mun come out strong, or it 'll be a break-down job, after all."

When the box was presented to Matthew a moment later there fluttered into it, just a little ostentatiously, a bit of printed paper—to the evident gratification of Jimmy, who, feeling assured that his particular "gathering" would exceed that of any of his colleagues, went on his way all smiles.

But poor Mrs. Armstrong's face bespoke dire despair. She had saved nineteen shillings at a cost of four pounds.

The hymn, though long, did not out-last the collection, and Dr. Hornblow, instead of winding up with the usual short prayer, spun it out to fully fifteen minutes, presumably in order to afford the collectors time to count their receipts.

At the word "Amen" Mr. Clinchworthy was seen to slip out of the vestry, glide to the pulpit steps, and hand a piece of paper to the preacher, at the same time whispering a word in his ear.

There was a hush of strained expectation throughout the chapel. Only a month previously the John Street folk had held their school sermons, and surpassed all their previous achievements, and the Charles Street congregation were dying to know whether they had beaten the record or still lagged behind.

Dr. Hornblow paused for a few seconds, as though to wind up the suspense of his hearers to the highest pitch. Then, in his clear, bell-like voice, which reached to the remotest corner of the building, he announced that the day's collections amounted to the magnificent sum of £278 11s. 5d.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Mrs. Clinchworthy. "We

have beaten John Street by exactly five pounds. It is the finest collection ever made in Whitebrook."

"Won by a neck, and my fi' pun' note did it," whispered Matthew to Jack as the organist struck up a triumphant voluntary. "They are sure to build a new chapel at Cobster Nook now; that building site is as good as sold."

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. ARMSTRONG did not count without his host. The committee, of which Mr. Clinchworthy was chairman, bought a building site, on chief, at Cobster Nook and erected thereon a chapel and schoolhouse, a proceeding which, as Matthew had foreseen, led to the erection of other places of worship, so bringing grist to the mill, directly and indirectly.

Another consequence of Clinchworthy's call at Pye Nest, and Mr. Armstrong's liberality at the school sermons, was a renewal of their ancient intimacy and a drawing closer of the bonds of friendship between the two families.

Albeit in some things they were antipathetic, and though Clinchworthy deplored his old comrade's worldliness and bluntness, and Matt laughed at Jimmy's foibles and fine ways, they held each other in respect. Both sprang from the same class and came from the same "country"; both had risen to affluence and consideration in the town to which they had come as poor men. Yet their characters were as dissimilar as their personal qualities. The one was religious and respectable, and liked to be well thought of, the other very much of a heathen (though there are worse folk than heathens), as careless of convention as a gypsy, and as indifferent to public opinion as a duke.

Matthew had probably never read a book in his life. Clinchworthy was a self-taught scholar, and a great

reader. Without some learning and knowledge of accounts he had never become a spinning master, and he owed his promotion to the positions of manager and managing partner mainly to his superior intelligence and his ability to write a well expressed letter in a legible hand. Where Clinchworthy's luck came in, and there are few rises in life in which luck does not play a part, was his connection with so eminent a firm as Sheldon Brothers who, being well stricken in years and sonless, had no reason for retarding Jimmy's advancement. When Mr. Amos, the elder brother, died, the managing partner was made full partner, and, as he lived well within his income (albeit rather given to ostentation) his capital account increased year by year, and he was in the way of becoming a rich man.

A few months after the Sunday school sermons, Mr. Clinchworthy consulted Matthew, in whose native shrewdness he had great confidence, about an important business matter.

Stephen Sheldon, the surviving brother, wanted to "go out," and to that end had made proposals which Clinchworthy deemed highly advantageous to himself. Though the concern had never had a bad stocktaking, Mr. Sheldon asked nothing for good will, and would let the bulk of his capital remain in the concern for a long term, at a moderate rate of interest. Only he wanted twenty thousand pounds down, to complete the purchase of an estate which he had recently bought.

This, as Clinchworthy explained to Matthew, would cripple him for working capital, Mr. Sheldon having not long previously withdrawn a large amount for a similar purpose, and in order to avoid the danger, while profiting by the opportunity, he proposed to take a sleeping partner

with twenty thousand pounds, to whom he would pay five per cent. interest on his capital and assign a fourth of the profits.

"It would be a fine investment," added Clinchworthy; "I have just been referring to our private ledger"—showing Matthew some figures—"and the partner might reckon on a return of from ten to fifteen per cent. one year with another. What do you think?"

"Nay, I wouldn't take no partners," said Matthew decisively. "Them as takes partners takes masters. Calling him a sleeping partner would not keep him i' bed. He'd be sure to meddle, and might ruin you. I know I wouldn't put it i' any man's power to ruin me."

"But your sons are partners with you, aren't they?"

"Not they. I give 'em good salaries, and at every stocktaking when we have done middling weel, and that's nearly always, I give 'em a feeling out of th' profits, and they're both rowling up nice balances to their credit, Mark particular. I mean to drive th' coach as long as I own it, and am able, Jimmy. Beside, two or three thousand a year is too much to pay for th' use o' twenty."

"Well, it was to you I thought of offering the fourth share," quoth Clinchworthy. "I know you would neither bother me nor ruin me, and your advice would be helpful, if you can find the money."

It was a chance in ten thousand. A share in one of the best concerns in Whitebrook, with an almost certain return of fifteen per cent., was a great temptation to a man who liked to make money. Yet Matthew did not hesitate.

"I am obliged for your offer, Jimmy, and I dare say I could contrive to scrat th' brass together, and it would be a fine investment, as you say. But I don't hold wi'

greediness. I've enough, and they say enough's as good as a feast, and I'm making it more! I stick to what I have said. Don't take a partner, nayther me nor another."

"That's all very well, but what else can I do? I want twenty thousand pounds, and even if I give the incomer a fourth share I shall have three-fourths of the profits, instead of half as at present."

"And twenty thousand pounds isn't to be pyked up in any ditch bottom."

Matthew thought a moment, and then added: "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll lend you ten thousand pound and—— You keep your account at th' District, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Are they liberal wi' you?"

"We have never tried them. Mr. Sheldon has old-fashioned notions. He does not like being indebted to a bank. It is seldom, indeed, that we overdraw our account, and then only for a trifling amount, which we could repay at a day's notice."

"Old-fashioned notions are reyt enough for old-fashioned folk. But you and me aren't old-fashioned; we're new-fashioned; and an overdraft can be uncommon useful, as I well know. Beside, I'd sooner be indebted to a bank than take a partner, any day. Now, Pyler's want business. Mr. Pyler told me so hissil, and I haven't the least doubt as he would let you have ten thousand pounds; happen a bit more, if you wanted. If you like, I'll ax him."

With this offer Clinchworthy closed gladly, and thanked Matthew warmly for his kindness, adding that he did not think it would be long before he was in a position both to

repay him and get straight with Pyler's—in the event of their acceding to his request.

"Of course it will not," rejoined Matthew. "Times is mending, and if you get a good year or two you'll be a rich man, and if Frank shapes right he'll be a better help than any partner; and what is more, you'll keep all th' profits for yourself and them as will come after you."

A few days afterward Matthew had an interview with Mr. Pyler who, though willing enough to take Sheldon Brothers' account, rather demurred to the proposed overdraft, saying that he would rather give credit to a brand new concern than an old one that had been gutted of its capital.

"But this concern hasn't been gutted of its capital," returned Matthew. "I thought you would be saying summat o' that sort, so I got Clinchworthy to give me a bit of a statement. Here it is. He calls it a *résumé* of their last balance—he likes using fine words, Jimmy does."

Mr. Pyler studied the statement intently for a few minutes, and when he looked up Matthew read in his face that the cause was won.

"It seems very satisfactory," said he, returning Matthew the paper. "Well, I will speak to my son, who is also my partner, and let you know our decision in a day or two."

"That as you like, Mr. Pyler, only you mustn't be surprised if Clinchworthy arranges with the District while you are considering. They have had th' account a long while, and I've no doubt would come out liberal afore they'd lose it."

The banker's keen old face puckered up into an amused smile.

"You are a shrewd diplomatist, Armstrong," he remarked, "and Mr. Clinchworthy ought to be greatly obliged to you. An overdraft of ten thousand, didn't you say; all further advance to be the subject of special application and for limited periods?"

"Ay, that's it."

"Good! You may tell Mr. Clinchworthy that we shall be glad to have his account on those conditions, and the more active he makes it the better we shall be pleased. By the bye, your friend is a great man among the Independents, and a shining light at Charles Street Chapel, isn't he?"

"He is, and it's th' only thing I know agen him. But it doesn't cost him as much as you might think, and keeps him out of mischief. Folk as goes regular to chapel is mostly steady, and sometimes honest; Clinchworthy is both."

"Oh, I am not finding fault with his chapel going, though, as for myself, I prefer going to church. What religion are you, Armstrong?"

"I haven't pyked one yet, Mr. Pyler."

"Not pyked one! It is time you did. There are plenty to pyke from," laughed the banker, who was almost as much of a heathen as Matthew himself.

"That's just where the trouble comes in. I've nowt gen religion, but when so many clever folk differ as to which is th' best, it isn't for a plain mon like me to decide. But you mustn't think I never go anywhere of a Sunday. I've been both to church and chapel, but as I can keep wakken in nayther it wouldn't be o' much use going regular. And if a man tries to do what is reyt and pays his way I don't think he'll be far wrong."

A sentiment of which Mr. Pyler expressed warm

approval, saying he wished all his customers were religious in the same sense, and then they shook hands and Matthew went away to inform Jimmy of the successful issue of his mission.

The Clinchworthys were very grateful for his timely help and sound advice, and in the bosom of his family Mr. Clinchworthy expressed a desire to offer Matthew some more substantial acknowledgment of his kindness than mere words.

"I should like to make him a handsome present," said he.

On which it became a question as to what form the present should take. The idea of a gold watch was mooted only to be dismissed. Matthew had a silver watch, bought with his earnings when he was a workman, which he prized highly, and, as Clinchworthy felt sure, would not be persuaded to wear any other.

Then Mrs. Clinchworthy made a felicitous suggestion. She thought a present made to any member of his family would please Matthew as much as one made to himself. It would be Nancy's birthday shortly, and by a happy coincidence Jack's fell on the same day. Why not make them each a present—Nancy a brooch, Jack a gold watch and chain?

The proposal was warmly acclaimed and straightway put into operation. Frank had to make a business journey to Manchester on the following Tuesday. His mother would accompany him, and the two would purchase the presents in consultation at the famous establishments of Otsford & Bollivant, in St. Ann's Square.

All of which came to pass—and something more.

Mother and son traveled together to Cottonopolis, and Mrs. Clinchworthy proceeded direct from the rail-

way station to St. Ann's Square; Frank, who had a call to make on the way, agreeing to join her in five or ten minutes, which probably meant twenty or thirty.

On entering the shop and mentioning her requirements the lady was bowed by an extremely affable salesman, whose face shone with an ever-ending smile, to a chair that chanced to be over against a massive mirror, in which was reflected the whole interior of the bejewelled store.

"Will you see some brooches first, madam?" asked the affable salesman, in his sweetest manner.

Mrs. Clinchworthy bowed, and the salesman placed before her a tray of brilliant and costly brooches. She did not propose to make a selection before the arrival of her son, in whose taste she had confidence, but in the meantime she could toy with them and "price" them.

As Mrs. Clinchworthy was thus pleasantly occupied she heard a voice behind her, which so startled and alarmed her that she bent her head low over the brooches lest her emotion should be observed by the smiling salesman.

It was a high-pitched, somewhat peculiar voice, and thus spoke:

"Can I see one of the principals, if you please?"

"Mr. Otsford is out, but perhaps Mr. Bollivant is at liberty," answered one of the attendants. "I will inquire. What name shall I say?"

"Phineas Herring, from Giltspur & Brandywines', Hatton Garden, London. Here is my card."

"Thanks! Be good enough to take a seat," and the attendant betook himself elsewhere.

By a great effort Mrs. Clinchworthy recovered her self-possession, and looking into the mirror saw there the

counterfeit presentment of the owner of the voice—a dapper, broad-shouldered man, soberly clad in a snuff-colored suit, whose high stock, silver-rimmed spectacles, and gray hair gave him an eminently respectable look.

The face was so much altered that Mrs. Clinchworthy would have passed it in a crowd without recognition; yet it was the same face, beyond a doubt, and the voice was the voice of Paul Armstrong.

"Thank God, Frank is not here," thought Mrs. Clinchworthy. "He might have marked my confusion, and made inquiries which I should have found it difficult to answer—in his hearing."

At this moment her son came in—a tall, sightly built young fellow, debonnaire and smiling, with a brown skin, brown hair, and brown eyes, well hatted and booted, a flower in his buttonhole, and a clouded cane in his hand.

While passing the *soi-disant* Phineas Herring, Frank accidentally dropped his cane, which Mr. Herring promptly picked up and handed to him.

"Thank you, sir, you are very kind," quoth the young fellow rather patronizingly, and then joined his mother, who had watched the incident—in the mirror—with strange feelings, and a mind so oppressed with forebodings of evil that she could scarcely keep her countenance.

"Mr. Bollivant is at liberty, and will be pleased to see you, Mr. Herring," said the attendant, who had executed his commission to the gentleman in question. "Kindly step this way."

Thereupon Giltspur & Brandywine's representative took up a black padlocked bag, which he had placed on the floor, and followed his leader.

Mrs. Clinchworthy gave a sigh of relief, inaudible to her son, and murmured inwardly, "Please God, I may never see him again!"

Not in all her life had the poor woman breathed a more veracious and heartfelt prayer.

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER the presents had been bought, Mrs. Clinchworthy and her son separated, she to shop, he to look after the matters which had brought him to town.

Later in the day they met at the railway station, and traveled home together.

"What do you think, mother?" asked Frank, when they were comfortably seated and well on their way. "I met that fellow who picked up my cane in Otsford's shop. You remember him—silver-rimmed spectacles and iron-gray hair?"

"Yes, I remember him," returned Mrs. Clinchworthy, with affected indifference.

"Well, I met him in Market Street, carrying his black bag—you remember the black bag? I never spoke to him in my life except when he picked up my cane, yet he stopped right in front of me and said, 'How do you do, young sir?' as cheeky as you please, and then asked me to have a drink with him."

Mrs. Clinchworthy turned pale.

"Did you?" she asked faintly.

"With a perfect stranger? Not I, indeed. Besides, I liked neither his manner nor his face—there is something repulsive about it to my thinking. However, I suppose he meant kindly, so I answered him civilly and passed on. All the same, it was a piece of cheek, don't you think? A fellow like that!"

"Yes, it was rather cool. But I dare say the man

meant no harm, may even have thought he was paying you a compliment, and—I am glad you gave him a civil answer. It is well to be civil to everybody, even under provocation, and if you should chance to meet the man again——"

"That's not likely, mother. He lives in London. However, if I happen to meet him again I promise to treat him with all the respect which I hope he deserves," returned Frank mock-seriously.

Mrs. Clinchworthy sank back in her cushioned corner, and taking up a paper made as though she read. It was only a pretext. Her heart was full, and she wanted to think.

Paul was alive and in England, and only by an accident had he missed recognizing her—in the presence of her son. Death would have been preferable to so dire a catastrophe.

And then the meeting in Market Street! She shuddered to think what might have happened had Frank accepted the invitation to drink. Paul, who was prying by nature, and whom age had doubtless rendered cunning and astute, would have wormed everything out of him.

What should she do? Ought she to tell James? Was it her duty to tell him? These were the questions that agitated Susan Clinchworthy's mind on her way to Whitebrook, and for some time thereafter.

Her conscience answered in the affirmative, and yet she wanted to spare him as long as possible. The evil tidings were like to break his heart, and he had been so good and she loved him so dearly. Poor James! How would he take it, and what would the world say—if the world came to know? But this consideration troubled her little. Should she tell her husband, or keep him in

happy ignorance a little longer? That was the question.

Again conscience said, "Tell him, he is as much interested in the matter as you are, and has never had a secret from you in his life. James Clinchworthy deserves your confidence, and if it should afterward come to his knowledge that you hid the thing from him his confidence in you would be gone."

True, she had not informed her husband of John Armstrong's meeting with his Uncle Paul, but doubting that the man was Paul, and more than half believing that he was not, she felt herself justified in keeping James in ignorance of a fact which might have no significance. Now, however, that she had heard Paul's voice with her own ears, and seen his face—in a glass—with her own eyes she had no excuse for keeping aught back.

Her husband must know all. It was her duty to tell him, and how painful soever the ordeal might be, tell him she would. This was her decision.

And then Susan Clinchworthy's thoughts traveled backward many years to the time when, a light hearted lass of seventeen, she was wooed by James Clinchworthy and Paul Armstrong, the one steady, hard working, and plain-looking, the other handsome, reckless, and gay, a skilled yet idle workman, who had been several times "in trouble," and whose reputation for honesty was not above reproach. Yet love, the unthinking love, of a foolish girl, so blinded her to his faults that despite the warnings of her friends she preferred him to his rival, and married him. Before the honeymoon was over she had reason to rue bitterly her folly, and before she had been three months wed her husband was a prisoner in Lancaster Castle on a charge of willful murder.

Paul Armstrong was a bold and inveterate "night hunter," and one night the gang which he led encountered a couple of keepers, of whom they killed one outright, and beat the other within an inch of his life.

A hanging matter, beyond a doubt, if the crime could be brought home to the perpetrators, but the proofs were defective, and when Paul Armstrong offered to turn Queen's evidence on condition of his life being spared the Crown Solicitor closed promptly with the offer.

So it came to pass that while two of his comrades swung, Paul got off with transportation for life—to the unspeakable indignation of all Furness. So wroth were the people against him that none of his neighbors or kin went to see him after his conviction, or would hold any communication with him whatever, and he on his part wrote to nobody, not even his wife.

Some people expressed sympathy with Susan, and were kindness itself. More gave her the cold shoulder. So strong, indeed, was the feeling against her that she found difficulty in getting work at her calling of seamtress, and was often in sore straits. Her misery was intensified by the fact that though she should never see Paul Armstrong again, and did not want to see him again, she was tied to him by bonds which death alone could sever.

It was a terrible trial for a girl not yet eighteen, and almost bereft her of her reason.

And then, when she was in the very depths of despair, startling news came, news of Paul's death. It came in a letter from Bob Rodgers, a man who was "doing time" at Chatham for manslaughter, to his parents at Milnthorpe. Susan went thither and saw the tidings in black and white. "Paul Armstrong was drowned last week

while attempting to escape from a hulk in the Medway, where he was confined pending his transportation to Australia."

There could be no mistake about it. What cannot speak cannot lie, as old Rodgers observed to Susan in reference to his son's letter, and it occurred neither to him nor to any of her acquaintainces that the story might not be true. It was so likely, so entirely in accord with the fitness of things, that a ruffian who had sacrificed two lives to save his own should come to a bad end.

Though shocked and grieved that the man she had once loved should have perished so miserably in his prime, Susan was not heart-broken. At any rate, she was free, and it was better to be a convict's widow than a convict's wife.

When the news reached Clinchworthy, who was working at Lancaster, he went to Barrow and renewed his suit. Susan could hardly believe he was in earnest.

"After all that has happened, James?" she said.

"Ay, after all that has happened. I think none the worse of you, dear. It was no fault of yours. You were always my true love, and if you won't have me I shall never wed, live as long as I may."

Susan was moved to tears, and out of sheer gratitude, which soon ripened into a great and ever growing love, she accepted him whom she had once rejected. From a merely mundane point of view it was the best thing she could do. She was very poor, and desirous above all things to get away from Barrow, and it would be an inestimable advantage to change the hated name of Armstrong for that of an honest man.

Clinchworthy would not hear of delays, and Susan wanted none. On the following Sunday they were

"shouted" for the first time, and three weeks later married.

All this befell within a twelve month of Susan's first marriage. It would perhaps have been more decent had they waited a while; it would certainly have been more prudent had they, before marrying, obtained official confirmation of Paul's supposed death. But they had no doubts, and poor folk are not so fastidious about the regularity of their marriages as their social superiors. For the rest, Clinchworthy was an ardent lover and wanted a helpmate and a home, and neither Susan nor he had, as yet, begun to consider the proprieties.

She made him a good wife and a happy home, and, while he was at the factory, found time to earn a little money with her needle. She encouraged him to get on, and being of good courage and a little better learned than her husband, helped him to get on, and, when he rose, rose with him. After various flittings, by way of mending themselves, they settled at Whitebrook, where, as has already been told, Clinchworthy made his fortune and became a man of importance.

Susan adapted herself easily to her new position, showing so much tact and versatility that people who knew no better thought she was to the manner born, and more than one Whitebrook lady, who fancied she had been well educated, found that Mrs. Clinchworthy was better informed than herself.

The married lives of the Clinchworthys had been singularly happy. Both were good-tempered, and a dower of good temper is better than riches; and though they met with trials and disappointments and underwent hardships neither had ever spoken a cross word to the other.

And now, when their outlook was all fair and they had nothing more to desire, this reprobate and murderer, whom they had well-nigh forgotten, had risen, as it were, from the grave to trouble their peace, and, it might be, break up their home.

Fear of this calamity wrung Susan's soul with anguish.

For dearly as she loved her husband she was not blind to his weakness—a liking for approbation, especially the approbation of the narrow world in which he moved. Precious to James were his position in the town and his predominance at the chapel, and his piety, though genuine as far as it went, was not unmixed with the dross of pride.

Treasurer and deacon, and manager of the schools, he overshadowed all his colleagues, by whom, nevertheless, he was highly esteemed. But on moral questions they were strictness itself. If it were only so much as suspected that his marital relations were not perfectly regular he would be deposed from his deaconship and excluded from the church.

The alternative was separation, and for Susan separation would be the end of all things; and while hoping that she and the children would gain the day she could not be sure. There was a doubt, and more than once she asked herself whether, after all, it were not better to put off the evil day. But the uncertainty and suspense were intolerable. They began to affect her health and spirits.

"I will face it and know the worst. Come what may I shall tell him to-morrow," was her final resolve.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE morrow was Saturday, a day on which James Clinchworthy generally took it easy, and came home early, giving an hour after his one o'clock dinner to the balancing of his private cash book and the checking of the chapel accounts, for he was a man of methodical habits, and engaged in no financial transaction of which he did not keep a record.

While he was thus occupied on the day in question, his wife entered the room, half office, half library, where he was at work, and sat down near him.

"Are you come to help me?" he inquired, smiling.

"If I can help you I shall only be too glad; but my present purpose is to tell you something," says she gravely.

"To tell me something?"

"Yes. Something that will pain you as much as it has pained me. I am a bringer of bad news, James."

"Bad—how? What? Business is good, the children are well—it is Kate—you have had a letter—she is ill."

"Kate is quite well. I heard from her only this morning."

"It is yourself, then. You have slept badly of late, and you look pale and worn. You must see Dr. Chorley."

"My health is quite good, though my mind is ill at ease. Keep up your courage, dear, and prepare for a

terrible surprise. One whom we thought dead is alive and in England."

Clinchworthy fell back in his chair as white as a sheet.

"Good Heavens! You don't mean Paul Armstrong?" he gasped.

"Yes. I saw him last Tuesday in Manchester—but he did not know me, hardly looked at me, indeed."

"Oh, Susan, you won't leave me?" he cried, stretching his arms toward her.

"Not until death parts us," she said, and then wiped the beaded perspiration from his brow and kissed him. Her heart had been lightened of a great load; his first thought in this supreme crisis of their lives was of her. That cry, "You won't leave me," told her that she still held the field. But she knew that the struggle was not over. The victory was still to be won.

James Clinchworthy leaned his head on his hands and remained silent for several minutes. He was dazed, unable to collect his thoughts, and in his ears there was a noise as of running water. If the grave had literally given up its dead he could not have been more confounded and perplexed. Paul Armstrong, his once rival and Susan's first husband, alive and in England! In the eye of the law her husband still; lord and master of his—James Clinchworthy's—wife, the mother of his children, his twenty-four years' faithful companion and helpmate.

As he recovered from the shock and regained the power of consecutive thought, he began to see matters in their true light, though he was still sorely bewildered and distressed. Looking up after a while he put to Susan a question which showed what was passing in his mind.

"What will they say at the chapel?"

"I care little what they say, except for your sake, dear. Besides, who is going to tell them? Nobody knows but ourselves and Matthew Armstrong. Paul may never find us out, and if he does we shall have to pay him to go away."

This was an optimistic way of regarding the matter, more so than the facts warranted, but now that James knew the worst Susan wanted to allay his anxiety and make the best of it.

"I am afraid Paul will find us sooner or later," he said despondently. "It must have been a narrow squeak on Tuesday, and even though the chapel people should not know, there is One above who knows. Aren't we living in sin, Susan?"

"No. We married in good faith, believing Paul to be dead. For twenty-four years we have lived happily together, children have been born to us, and whatever the law may say I am your wife, and you are my husband."

"If I could only think so, Susan, if I could only think so," groaned James. "But you know what the Old Book says: 'Those whom God hath put together let no man put asunder.'"

"Ay, those whom God hath put together. But God never put me and Paul Armstrong together—the devil rather."

"Possibly. It is a mysterious dispensation, but I am afraid that isn't the view of it they would take at the chapel."

"The chapel, always the chapel," cried Susan bitterly. "What will you do, then; leave me and the children? For I shall never leave you."

"Leave you and the children!" exclaimed Clinchworthy, aghast. "As if I could!"

"But you will have to do it if you want to keep your position at the chapel. Look here, James; do you regard me as a virtuous woman? Have I been a good wife to you, a good mother to your children?"

"Why do you ask? You know. Yes, a thousand times yes! You are dearer to me than all the world. Only I want to do right."

"Right! Right! What is right? Would it be right to deprive our children at their tender age of a father's care? For that is what it would come to. Oh, surely men are differently made from women. You are thinking of the chapel and public opinion, while I, who, if Paul's return becomes known, will be flouted and despised by the self righteous and the unco guid, think only of you and your children! You said just now that I was dearer to you than all the world. Well, you are not only dearer, you are more to me than all the world!"

Again Clinchworthy bowed his head, and tears filled his eyes.

"Forgive me, dear; I did not mean to reproach you," continued his wife, bending over him, and taking his hand. "But I am so distressed that I hardly know what to say. You, too, are upset, and no wonder. Neither of us is in a condition to judge calmly. Let us take advice."

"But whose? We should have to tell everything."

"Matthew Armstrong. He knows everything already, except about Tuesday. He is the best friend we have, and I would rather have his shrewd common sense than a more learned man's wisdom."

"By all means let us consult Matthew," said Clinchworthy eagerly. "We are in sore need of guidance. As you say, I am upset, I feel as if my brain were paralyzed. When shall we see him?"

"At once. I will take Clara and May out for a drive, —it will be a good pretext,—call at Pye Nest, tell Matthew that you are not very well and want to see him on a matter of business, and bring him back with me. And while I am there I shall ask Mrs. Armstrong, Nancy, and Jack to tea, and we will give them their presents instead of sending them. To-morrow is their birthday, and it will make the evening more cheerful for us."

"You are right. Order the carriage and go quickly, and while you are gone I will think and pray."

Half an hour later Mrs. Clinchworthy and her children were at Pye Nest. She found Matthew, who had unfolded a taste for gardening, trimming rose trees, and delivered her message as pleasantly as though her mind had been at ease.

"Why, what's th' matter wi' Jimmy?" asked Matthew.

"Oh, nothing particular. Just a little out of sorts and spirits—the result of overwork, I fancy. A talk with you would do him all the good in the world, and he wants to consult you about something."

"All right. I'll go with you, if you'll wait a twothry minutes while I wash and don mysel'."

"And will you come afterward and have tea with us," said Mrs Clinchworthy to Nancy, "you and your mother and Jack?"

Nancy answered "with pleasure," so far as she was concerned, and proposed that they should go into the house and ask her mother, adding that Jack had not yet returned from the shop, but she had no doubt he would be pleased to accept Mrs. Clinchworthy's invitation.

Mrs. Armstrong was not easily persuaded to accept Mrs. Clinchworthy's invitation. She objected to leave the house in sole charge of th' lasses (meaning thereby

the servants), did not think it prudent, indeed, but liking less to be left alone with them, ended by consenting.

By the time this matter was arranged Matthew was ready, and Mrs. Clinchworthy and he set out for Brookfield House. As Clara and May were not very little, and had sharp ears, their elders had to mind what they said, and speak low.

"What's up?" asked Matthew in an undertone.

"Paul. I saw him in Manchester last Tuesday; fortunately he did not recognize me," whispered Susan, and then explained under what circumstances they had met. "I thought it better to tell James, and he knows everything. He is naturally much upset, and wants to talk to you. You will stand my friend, Matt?"

"Of course I will. But let me have him to mysel' a bit at first. You can come in afterward."

"I think so, too. I don't often take part in business discussions, and you are going to talk business. Not for the world would I have anybody get an inkling. You understand?"

"I reckon I do. And make yourself easy, Susan. I think I can manage your Jimmy."

"It's very kind of you to come, and so soon," observed Clinchworthy, as he and Matthew shook hands. "Has Susan told you anything?"

"Not much, yet quite enough. She got a scare o' Tuesday, it seems."

"Ay, and I have had a scare to-day. You know all, what would you advise me to do?"

"Nowt."

"But suppose Paul comes here, or the fact of his being alive leaks out? Think what a scandal it would make

both in the town and at the chapel. People would say that while professing to be a Christian and taking a leading part at Charles Street, I was living in sin. I should be put to open shame."

"If that's th' way you look at it there's nowt for you but to turn Susan and th' childer out o' doors."

"Matthew Armstrong, what do you take me for?" exclaimed Clinchworthy indignantly. "Never will I be guilty of such an infamy. Susan and the children shall have this house and an ample allowance, and I will live by myself in some cottage."

"You would call and see 'em sometimes, I reckon?"

"Often. I would spend my evenings with them."

"The worst thing you could do. Folk would say you were first a hypocrite and then a coward, that you have lived wi' Susan well nigh on five-and-twenty year, and only left her because you feared it was going to be found out as you were not gradely wed."

"We did not marry until we heard Paul was dead. We believed we were gradely wed."

"So did I. But it isn't what we believed, it's what other folk will think—and say. If you want to keep your place at Charles Street, whatever happens, there is only one way. You must quit this house to-night, and not return so long as Susan is here, and go and tell th' minister all about it, and undertake to send her a long way off and see her no more. If she lived anywhere about Whitebrook, folk would say that after putting her away as your wife you were keeping her as your mistress. How would that suit you?"

Clinchworthy remained silent, and seemed quite dumfounded.

"And I doubt whether it would answer your purpose,

after all," continued Matthew. "Th' case would be brought before a church meeting, and you would have to admit that your only ground for believing Paul was dead was a letter from a convict as you couldn't produce. If they believed you at all they would say as you should have made further inquiry, that you had willfully shut your eyes, and were every bit as much to blame as if you had committed willful bigamy. They would turn you out just as if you hadn't tried to make amends, and your happiness and Susan's would be gone forever, to say nowt o' your childer's prospects. And all for what?"

"But consider the sin, Matthew, consider the sin," moaned Clinchworthy.

"Sin be hanged! Whatever folk may say, you and Susan married in good faith. You thought Paul wor gone dead,—your conscience is clear on that point, any way,—and you have lived together all these years as man and wife. You are getting on in years, and not likely to have any more childer. Don't strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. If you have done wrong it's done, and cannot be undone. As for the chapel lot, never mind if they do turn you out. You'll get over it. Sensible folk will think no waur on you for denying them and sticking to Susan, and there will happen be no need."

"You don't think Paul will turn up, then?"

"Well, when I first heard he was in England I thought he was sure to turn up. But he was a common vagabond then, a penniless tramp, and I thought he might beg or steal his way to Furness, and find out where we wor and try to squeeze summat out on us. But from what Susan says he seems to have getten a good place in London, under a false name. How, God only knows. Dressed

up quite like a gentleman, silver-rimmed spectacles and kid gloves! Why should he want to look us up? For owt he knows we are common working folk—worse off than hissel—and I don't think he cared much for Susan. He wed her less because he cared for her than to spite you."

"But there is always the possibility—and what you don't want to happen generally does happen. It was a very narrow shave on Tuesday, and if Paul goes to Manchester on business he may come to Whitebrook on a like errand."

"If he does, and makes any bother, we must shut his mouth. I don't think it will be very difficult."

Clinchworthy leaned his head on his hand in deep thought; then, looking up after a while, said decisively:

"I'll take your advice, Matthew."

"And do nowt."

"And do nothing."

Here the door was softly opened, and Mrs. Clinchworthy entered, wearing an intent and anxious look.

"It's all right, Susan," says Matthew. "Jimmy has decided to do nowt, and if th' worst happens, to face it."

"Oh, I am so thankful!" she exclaimed, with a sigh of relief. "I knew that James would do what was right, if only for the children's sake. All the same, I have been in purgatory for the last half-hour. And now that this trial is over I want you to do me a favor, both of you. Let the subject drop; let us never, unless we are compelled, mention that man's name again, even among ourselves."

"I agree," said Matthew.

"I also," said Clinchworthy, "in the hope and belief, which our old friend here shares, that the necessity will never arise."

CHAPTER XVII.

PAUL ARMSTRONG was a reprobate even before he became a convict, and long intercourse with other malefactors on the hulks and at the Antipodes neither mended his morals nor disposed him to earn his bread by honest labor. After the partial remission of his sentence, which was for "life" (not the "term of his natural life"), he became a vagabond and a wanderer, getting a livelihood by shifts and devices, working at his trade of wheelwright and carpenter only when other resources failed, made several coasting and deep sea voyages, sometimes as cook, occasionally as carpenter, more than once as common seaman, and, finally, by way of variety, worked his passage to Southampton and set out by devious courses for London.

The reader knows the rest—of his exploits at Ashcombe, his theft of Phineas Herring's testimonials, and the accident which served him so well with the Giltspurs.

The outcast regarded his engagement by Mr. Giltspur as a great stroke of luck. He thought it would give him an opening for a little safe plundering. A few diamonds or costly trinkets were easily appropriated, and in a large establishment not soon missed. Then the idea occurred to him that, if the situation suited him and he were well treated, it might be worth his while, simply as an experiment, to try whether honesty did not answer better than roguery.

Circumstances rather than inclination constrained

Paul to adopt the latter alternative, since he had no sooner entered on his new duties than he discovered that there were fewer facilities for larceny than he had expected, hardly any, indeed. To begin with, Mr. Giltspur, albeit good-natured and well-disposed toward Herring, was essentially a man of business, and had no intention of exposing the new hand to temptation until he had proved him. Furthermore, the concern was well managed, and so sharp an eye kept on the stock that a theft, however trifling, could hardly fail to be swiftly detected, and Paul did not want to be detected. He had reached the age of prudence, an age when hazardous risks are not lightly undertaken, and he knew that with his antecedents a second conviction would insure him a long spell of penal servitude, of which he had already had more than enough. Then Mr. Giltspur behaved handsomely. Paul's wage was to be two pounds a week, with a bedroom on the premises, and breakfast. There was also a promise of advancement if he showed himself worthy of it, and he liked his work. It was not monotonous, and did not keep him altogether indoors. He copied and addressed letters, went errands to the showroom in Regent Street, and was occasionally intrusted with commissions that took him to distant parts of the town.

Some knowledge of bookkeeping, acquired during his servitude, proved useful, and when he had gained the firm's confidence Mr. Giltspur sent him on collecting expeditions, sometimes even giving him money to lodge with the firm's bankers.

More than once Paul was sorely tempted to bolt with the money or the proceeds of his collections, but, fearing pursuit and dreading the penalty, he refrained. And he was not wholly bad; few men are. Now and then he was

moved by good impulses, survivals from guiltless days. He had not been used to kindness, and the kindness shown to him by his employer and his employer's wife won his respect and touched his heart. At least once a month Mrs. Giltspur asked him to Dulwich, and he nearly always went away a crown or half a sovereign richer than he had gone, rather extravagant payment for hanging curtains, adjusting window sashes or mending a piece of broken furniture. But the lady held that she still owed a debt of gratitude to the man who had saved her from deadly peril.

Hence it came to pass that whenever the *soi disant* Herring was knavishly inclined he would say to himself:

"No, hang it! it would be an infernal shame to abuse the confidence of people who are so trustful and kind. Besides, I don't think it would pay."

This new born rectitude had its reward. Paul's salary was increased, and himself promoted to a position of trust—taking out parcels of jewelry and gems for the inspection of town customers, and one day Mr. Giltspur sent him to Manchester on a similar errand.

It was then that he saw Susan without recognizing her, though if he had scrutinized her face he might have done. But her son seemed so strangely like one he had known long ago, and so excited his curiosity, that when afterward he met Frank in Market Street, he asked him to take a drink, hoping thereby to draw him into conversation and learn his name, an attempt which, owing to the young fellow's caution and distrust, came to naught.

On Paul's return to London Mr. Giltspur hinted that if he went on as well as he had begun, he might hope at no very distant date to become one of the firm's

regular travelers, whereat the ex-convict greatly rejoiced, for travelers received several hundred pounds a year, in addition to a handsome allowance for expenses.

Meanwhile prosperity and age were making Paul miserly. So he limited the drawings on account of his salary to thirty shillings a week, and arranged with Mr. Giltspur to let the balance accumulate to his credit at interest, with the result that for the first time in his life Paul became the possessor of two or three score pounds of honestly won money which, together with his promised promotion, made Mr. Herring exceedingly well satisfied with himself, and confirmed him in the opinion that it paid better to be on the square than on the cross.

But it is not easy to avoid reaping as you have sown, and when our ex-convict's prospects seemed the brightest an event befel that, besides frustrating his hopes, had an important bearing on his own fate, and, ultimately, on the fortunes of some of our friends at Whitebrook.

This was the way of it.

Paul's evenings were at his own disposal, and he generally divided them between the gallery of some theater and the bar parlor of the Black Bull, where there was always good company and often a good song or two. Now and then, however, he looked in at the Pelican, a tavern in a court off Fleet Street much frequented by the betting fraternity, for Paul had always taken an interest in racing, and occasionally laid ten shillings or a sovereign on a horse that he fancied, or of which he had heard a good report.

One night, as he left the house, he was accosted by a horsily-dressed, dark-visaged man, who invited him to return and take a drink. Paul assented, and when the

whiskies had been put out of sight the stranger inquired in what direction he was going.

"Holborn way," said Paul.

"I am going that way myself," quoth the stranger. "If you like, I will bear you company."

Again Paul, wondering what all this affability from an absolute stranger meant, assented, and the two sallied forth together.

"You bet a little, I think?" observed the stranger, as they wended up Fleet Street.

"Nothing to speak of. I never risk more than a sov., and not often that," says Paul.

"It will take you a long time to get rich at that rate," laughed the other. "Let me see; you are at Giltspur & Brandywine's, Hatton Garden, aren't you? and your name's Herring, isn't it?"

"How the deuce do you know that?" exclaimed Paul, now more surprised than ever.

"Never mind how. It is enough that I do know."

"Well, since you make so free with my name, what may yours be, and what is your game?" demanded Paul suspiciously.

"My name is McAdam, and my game—— But you can keep a secret, if it's made worth your while?"

"I reckon I can, if, as you say, it's made worth my while."

By this time they were opposite the gateway leading from Chancery Lane into Old Square.

"Let us turn in here and go across the Fields," proposed McAdam. "It's quieter than Holborn. Here are a couple of sovs., by way of earnest, and as proof that it will be worth your while to fall in with my views."

Paul promptly pocketed the sovereigns. He never refused anything—on principle.

"Now, what's the secret, and what do you expect me to do for the money?" says he.

"Five minutes' work; and if you do it right you shall have a thousand pounds more."

"Two hundred pounds a minute isn't bad pay. I'm your man. But what's your game?"

"This is entirely between ourselves," said McAdam, lowering his voice to a whisper. "You won't split?"

"Of course I won't split. Do you take me for a duffer?" demanded Paul indignantly.

"A thousand pounds and no risk. All you have to do is to take a mold in wax of the key of your governor's big safe."

"That's all, is it? Well, I've had the same notion myself. But it won't be so easy managed as you think. The governor keeps that key in his pocket; never lets it go out of his possession. All the same, there is a possibility," continued Paul, after a few seconds' thought. "I sometimes go to his house at Dulwich on Saturday afternoons to do a few odd jobs for the mistress, and I have seen the keys lying about in the governor's room. I am going there to-morrow. You tumble?"

"Of course I do. You are no dullard, Mr. Herring; and if you get the mold and the business goes through all right, as I have no doubt it will, you shall have a thousand pounds of the loot. When shall we meet again?"

"How would Sunday night suit you?"

"I am at your service. Sunday night let it be. Nine o'clock at the Pelican, and I hope you will bring the mold with you. And now I think it would be well for

us to part. There are observant bobbies about. I think I spotted one in plain clothes a few minutes since; and Holborn is better lighted than the Fields. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" returned Paul, and each man went his way.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALBEIT Paul Armstrong responded so readily to McAdam's proposal, he had no intention of conniving at McAdam's nefarious project. Not altogether because it was nefarious. A thousand pounds was a large sum, and if the scheme had been feasible and the risk nil, Paul's scruples as to playing his benefactor false might have been overcome. But he did not see his way, even though he could get the key and take the mold—a feat which, as he had observed to his tempter, would not be easy. He might be detected in the act. Then he had no assurance that if he succeeded, and the burglary came off, he should get his share of the plunder. For Paul had no faith in the saying that there is honor among thieves. He had known a good many, and found precious little of that quality among them. Moreover, as Paul judged from McAdam's manner and language, he was a knave of superior education, probably a blackleg who had seen better days, the worst sort of scoundrel and the least trustworthy. Yet, according to the scheme proposed, he would have to trust him—unless he chose (and nothing was further from his thoughts) to take an active part in the robbery; and if, as was probable, McAdam should disappear as mysteriously as he had appeared, his confederate might have to whistle for his part of the loot.

There was also another consideration. It would be obvious that the safe, which had already successfully

resisted several burglarious attempts, had been opened with a key. Hence the question would arise as to how had the thieves obtained the key, and suspicion fall on all the employees of the house, while Paul's visits to Dulwich, where alone a mold could be obtained, must needs point to him as the culprit.

"Not if I know it, Mr. McAdam," he said to himself. "It isn't good enough. I twig his game; now, what's mine?"

After further reflection, Paul came to the conclusion that his game was to tell Mr. Giltspur what had happened, and let him deal with the matter as he thought best.

"It'll be a leg-up for me," he thought. "I shall lay the governor under an obligation, get praised for my honesty, and, as likely as not, a handsome present. Yes, that's my game."

On the following morning this design was carried into effect. Paul saw Mr. Giltspur and told his story, omitting, however, a few trifling details which he thought might not impress the governor favorably. For instance, he did not say that he had been at the Pelican, much less that he was in the habit of going there; merely that as he was strolling up Fleet Street a stranger tapped him on the shoulder and asked him to take a drink; neither did he mention his promise of secrecy, the receipt of the two sovereigns, or the device which he had imagined for getting temporary possession of the key.

Mr. Giltspur looked very grave. There were seldom less than twenty thousand pounds' worth of precious stones in the big safe, which was, however, so solidly constructed and thoroughly thief-proof that he had no fear of its being broken open by anything short of an explosion of nitro-glycerine or gunpowder.

But tampering with the firm's servants was a new feature, and suggested unpleasant possibilities. True, he was the custodian of the key, but he might inadvertently leave it behind him at the office, or lay it down for a few minutes on his desk—had indeed done so more than once. And how if the gang, of whom McAdam was probably the chief, should waylay him on his way home, or in the neighborhood of his own house, stun or chloroform him, take the key and effect their purpose before he recovered consciousness?

These were disturbing reflections, and Mr. Giltspur reflected so long and looked so gloomy that Paul began to think that instead of being praised he was going to be blamed.

But presently Mr. Giltspur raised his head and the cloud cleared from his face.

"You have done very well, Herring, very well indeed," he said. "It was a happy thought of yours to listen to the scoundrel's overtures instead of repulsing him at the outset, and you have placed me under a great obligation. But this is a case for the police. I shall put it into their hands at once. Don't go until I return."

Whereupon Mr. Giltspur donned his hat and quitted the office. But in an hour he was back, and with him came a gentleman whom he introduced to Paul as Mr. Frost. Paul did not need telling that Frost was a detective, and felt a little uneasy; he had an instinctive dislike for detectives. Nevertheless, he put a bold face on it, and at Mr. Giltspur's request retold his story, answering the questions that followed with his habitual *sang froid.*

"I should like to lay that fellow by the heels," said Mr. Giltspur, when the detective was in full possession of the facts.

"So should I, and we will see whether we cannot lay a trap for him," answered Frost. "The appointment is for nine o'clock to-morrow, Sunday night, you say, Mr. Herring?"

"Yes, that's it," answered Paul.

"Good! Be there at nine, sharp. McAdam will propose drinks, of course, and when they are consumed you will quit, equally of course, the Pelican not being exactly a safe place for an exchange of dangerous confidences. I shall be hanging about the entrance of the court, and as you step into the street you will say, 'Which way shall we go, McAdam?' That will be the signal, and I'll have the darbies on him in the twinkling of a bedpost."

"I tumble; but you will have to be smart. He does not look like a chap who would let himself be lagged without a struggle."

"Well, there will be two of us, and, to make assurance doubly sure, I'll have a brace of constables within call."

And then, after a word aside with Mr. Giltspur, the detective took his leave, and later in the day Herring went to Dulwich and received hearty congratulations from Mrs. Giltspur on his alertness and integrity, also, what was more to the purpose, a present of five pounds from her husband.

"I am on the right tack; honesty pays," said Paul to himself as he wended homeward. "All the same, I wish the governor had not brought that bobby to the office. He did not take his eyes off me for a minute, and McAdam won't be easily run in; he'll hurt somebody, and it may be me. However, in for a penny in for a pound; I'll go through with it."

As the clock went nine on the next night Paul walked into the Pelican, and seeing naught of McAdam,

ordered a glass of whisky, took up a copy of *Bell's Life*, and while pretending to read it kept a constant eye on the door. But no McAdam appeared, and at half-past nine Paul went outside to see Frost, whom he spotted without difficulty.

"Our man hasn't turned up. What's to be done?" he asked.

"Give him another half hour, and back with you at once," was the peremptory answer.

Paul returned and ordered another glass, only instead of hiding himself behind *Bell's Life* he discussed racing matters with some of the betting fraternity whose acquaintance he had made; still, however, watching the door. But he watched in vain, and shortly after the stroke of ten sought Mr. Frost once more.

"Well?" asked the detective when they met.

"No show," returned Paul.

"Are you sure he said nine o'clock?"

"Quite."

"Why hasn't he come, then?"

"Been accidentally detained or smelled a rat, I should say."

"How the deuce could he smell a rat? You surely haven't——"

"Of course I haven't. What the deuce do you take me for?" demanded Paul indignantly.

"What do I take you for? I don't see how he could smell a rat. However, there is no use stopping here. It's all up for the present. If you see anything more of McAdam, let me know. Good-night!"

Paul answered nothing. He felt disappointed, and Frost's manner was offensive.

In the morning he made his report to Mr. Giltspur,

who, after expressing his disappointment, asked Paul to what cause he ascribed McAdam's failure to keep the appointment.

"I guess he smelled a rat, sir. He is as sharp as a weasel, and, as likely as not, wanted by the police; you may be sure he would look round and wait a while before entering the court, and the sight of a man loitering about one side of the street, and two bobbies within hail on the other, would be quite enough to send him off, double quick. A better plan would have been for Frost to be in the Pelican bar before nine o'clock and follow us out."

"Why didn't you propose it?"

"I was not asked to make a proposal, sir, and from the look of him Frost is one who likes his own way."

"Well, it cannot be helped; we must keep a sharp look-out, and you will perhaps come across McAdam again."

"Perhaps. But, as he may suspect that I laid a snare for him, I would rather not come across him again."

A while later came Frost the detective.

"What is your theory, Mr. Frost—why did not that villain turn up?" demanded Mr. Giltspur.

"Well, if I must speak plain——"

"By all means speak plain."

"Well, if I must speak plain, I doubt whether there was any villain to turn up."

"If you call that speaking plain, I should like you to speak plainer, Mr. Frost."

"Well, in my opinion there is no McAdam. Unless I am greatly mistaken the whole story was imagined by Herring."

"Impossible! Herring is an honest fellow; quite incapable of such duplicity. Besides, what could he hope to gain by it?"

"Your favor; possibly a reward. I hope you won't think me impertinent—I make the inquiry in your interest—if I ask what you know about Herring."

"Well, he has been in our employ more than two years, and I have found him both honest and capable. He rendered me a great service, and his testimonials were unexceptionable. Why do you ask?"

"Because Herring is an old lag."

"An old lag?"

"I mean that he has worked in a chain gang. Anyhow, he has worn leg fetters. A man who wears leg irons for any length of time contracts a peculiar gait of which he can never entirely get rid. Herring has that gait, and I dare lay my life that he is a returned transport."

"A returned transport! I don't believe it, Mr. Frost. You are quite wrong. Nothing could be better than his testimonials. You shall see them. He left them in my hands."

With that Mr. Giltspur took from a drawer the leather case which Paul had picked up in the inn on the London Road, and explained the circumstances under which he had made Herring's acquaintance.

"These are all right, and seem to be genuine," observed Frost, after a careful examination of the testimonials. "But how do you know they were honestly come by? They, as well as the name, may have been borrowed, bought, found, or stolen. I have met with many such cases, and if I am right about Herring being an old lag he could get testimonials in no other way."

"These are mere surmises, entirely unsupported by evidence, and until I have proof that Herring has deceived me I shall continue to treat him as I have

hitherto done," said Mr. Giltspur, after a moment's reflection. "All the same, in his interest as well as ours, these doubts must, if possible, be set at rest. Will you undertake the task?"

"I will do my best."

"That is all I ask. The house will defray any reasonable expenses you may incur, and pay you for your trouble, whether you succeed or fail."

To this proposal Frost assented, and after taking a copy of Phineas Herring's testimonials, took his leave, saying that so soon as he had anything to report he should call again.

CHAPTER XIX.

As Mr. Giltspur had observed to the detective, the latter's imputations against Herring were surmises, unsupported by facts, yet disturbing surmises, not to be lightly treated or peremptorily dismissed. Apart from the testimonials, which might have been surreptitiously obtained (the possibility was undeniable), Mr. Giltspur knew nothing of Herring's antecedents, and when he came to think about it, the man was singularly reticent about his past, never speaking of his early days or saying from what part of the country he came, and seemed to have neither relatives nor old friends. Then there was the peculiarity in Herring's gait which Frost had detected, and which Mr. Giltspur, once it had been pointed out to him, could perceive. The man certainly did drag one of his legs, but whether this was an indication that at one period of his life he had worn fetters, Mr. Giltspur was unable to determine, and it did not suit his purpose to refer the question to an expert. There were grounds for suspicion and inquiry, yet not for condemnation, and being a just man he resolved to regard Herring as innocent until he was proved to be guilty, and to treat him as he had hitherto done, a course of action in which he was strenuously supported by his wife. Nothing short of his own admission would convince her that Herring was either an impostor or an "old lag." She ascribed Frost's imputations to malice. But for his maladroitness McAdam would have been captured, and now Frost

wanted to punish Herring for his own shortcomings, and retrieve his damaged reputation by making impossible discoveries.

When week after week passed, and the detective made no sign, Mr. Giltspur began to be of the same opinion. When two months went by, and Frost still remained mute, he felt sure that the attempt to find another Phineas Herring had failed, and thanked Heaven that a troublesome business was done with. But one morning, when Mr. Giltspur was least expecting him, the detective appeared at the office, and there was a swelling importance in his manner which showed that he was big with news.

"I was beginning to think I was not to have this pleasure again," observed Mr. Giltspur, after inviting his visitor to be seated.

"Well, it has been a longish job. But I think we are in sight of land at last," returned Frost complacently. "However, I will tell you all about it, and then you can judge for yourself. My first endeavor was to ascertain whether, as I believed, there was an original Phineas Herring, and what had become of him, to which end I addressed myself to several of the ship-owners in whose vessels he had sailed. But ship-owners are slow to answer such-like inquiries; they give trouble and bring no money in. However, the attempt was worth making, but as nothing came of it I got a friend of mine at Southampton, where, as Herring's testimonials showed, he had often been, to make personal inquiries both at shipping offices and among seafaring men. I also made frequent visits for the same purpose to the Sailors' Home in Wapping, and elsewhere. At long intervals I heard that a man named Phineas Herring had shipped not

more than a year previously as steward on an Orient Line steamer, bound for Melbourne. On inquiry at the company's office I found this to be true, but, unfortunately, he had shipped only for the voyage out, and I could not learn anything about his subsequent movements. Then I tried another device—advertised in several papers, published in seaport towns, that if Phineas Herring, formerly a corporal in the Royal Marines, lately steward on an Orient liner, would write to an address which I gave he would hear something to his advantage, and that anybody who would put him in communication with the advertiser should be rewarded.

"Advertising is expensive, but I hope that when you read this letter,"—handing it to Mr. Giltspur,—"which came yesterday, you will think that the money was well laid out."

The letter, dated from Liverpool, and signed Phineas Herring, merely said that the writer was the person described in the advertisement, and that he should be glad to hear further from the advertiser.

"What next?" asked Mr. Giltspur. "This man gives neither details nor references, and if one Herring may be an impostor so may another."

"That is quite true, sir, and I thought that if I went to Liverpool I could find out whether he is the real Simon Pure or not."

"No, let him come here. If he sailed from the Thames last year in an Orient liner there is sure to be somebody in London who can identify him. And then there are the testimonials. If he is able to describe the contents of the leather case, and account for its being in another man's possession, we shall know beyond a doubt that he is the man. Yes, send him a Post Office order

for two pounds and ask him to meet us at my solicitor's, whose address I will give you, on Thursday at noon. If that time does not suit him let him name his own."

"But suppose he keeps the money and stays away?"

"In that case we shall know, equally beyond a doubt, that he, and not this other Herring, is the impostor. Here are the two sovereigns."

"As you like, sir. I shall write to Herring to-night, and when I get his answer either drop you a line or call again," responded the detective, albeit not very cheerfully. He had counted on a pleasant trip to Liverpool at Mr. Giltspur's expense.

On the Friday after this interview, which took place on a Monday, Paul Armstrong was requested to stop into Mr. Giltspur's room, and obeyed the summons with a light heart, but the unwonted sternness of his employer's face, and the hardness of his voice as he said "Please sit down," told him that something was wrong, and he had a foreboding of his doom.

"I have a very painful duty to perform, Herring—for that is the only name I know you by," began Mr. Giltspur, "so painful that the anticipation of it kept me awake all last night. It has come to my knowledge—no matter how—that you are not the Phineas Herring described in the testimonials on the strength of which I gave you employment."

Paul drew a deep breath, looked his benefactor boldly in the face, and resolved on the instant to "brazen it out."

"I do not know who has told you this, sir," he said resolutely. "But it is as false as hell. I am Phineas Herring."

"You stick to it that you are the Herring described in these testimonials?"—showing him the leather case.

"I do."

Mr. Giltspur spoke a word into the tube that lay on his desk, and a moment afterward the door opened and in came Frost and the real Simon Pure.

"Have you ever seen this man before?" demanded Mr. Giltspur, pointing to Paul.

"Yes, he is the man I met in the Wheatsheaf on the London road, and I am almost sure he stole the leather case containing my testimonials. Anyhow, it was in my pocket a few minutes before he left the house, and if I had missed it before he had been too long gone to be caught I should have followed him up and given him in charge."

"And I may tell you," added Mr. Giltspur, turning to Paul, "that Herring, the true Herring, gave me an exact description of the contents of the case. He also remembered the date of his loss, and it corresponds with that on which you and I first met. Furthermore, he has been identified as Phineas Herring by two persons of undoubted respectability, who have known him many years."

Paul hung his head. In the face of evidence so damning, blank denial had availed him nothing.

Mr. Giltspur made a sign to Frost, whereupon the latter and Herring left the room.

"You remain silent, and no wonder," observed Mr. Giltspur. "You once did me a great service, which I have endeavored to repay by generous treatment and rapid promotion. Whether it is true that you are an ex-convict I cannot tell. I make no point of that. But the gross deception you have practiced renders it quite im-

possible for us to retain you in our service. You are dismissed, and within an hour you must leave this office, never to return."

"The game is up, nothing but to plead guilty and throw myself on the mercy of the court," thought Paul.

"You are quite right, Mr. Giltspur, I did deceive you," he said, in a voice of well-feigned penitence and real regret. "But only that once, and I have tried, and I think not unsuccessfully, to repay your kindness with faithful service. What you have heard is true. I am an ex-convict. But my offense was not a very black one. When I was a young fellow, young and reckless, I foolishly took part in a poaching expedition. We fell in with a body of keepers and watchers; there was a fight; one of the keepers got killed, and though mine was not the hand that struck the blow I was sentenced to a long term of transportation, part of which, however, was remitted. But when I got my freedom I found it hard to get my living, and after knocking about at the Antipodes for several years worked my passage to England, and landed at Southampton with only a few shillings in my pocket and started for London, thinking that I might get a place there, though, as I had neither character nor references, without much hope of success. I saw Herring at the Wheatsheaf, but I did not steal the leather case; I found it by the roadside near the inn, and not knowing what was become of the owner, put it in my pocket. When you asked my name and so kindly offered me a place I knew you would expect some sort of character, and on the impulse of the moment I called myself Phineas Herring and showed you his testimonials. My own name is Paul Armstrong. I know it was wrong, very

wrong, but the temptation coming on me all of a sudden was irresistible."

"What you say may be true," observed Mr. Giltspur, "but you have told me so many lies that my confidence is quite gone. Didn't you protest only just now that you were Phineas Herring? Besides, your story is not consistent with itself, and too plausible to be quite credible. But let that pass. You have served us honestly and efficiently. For this reason, and because of the sevice you once rendered us, and the pleadings of my wife in your favor, I am going to deal with you liberally. The balance to your credit in our books is something short of eighty pounds. I have added to it, in lieu of notice, as much as brings it up to a hundred and fifty, for which I have drawn a check. Here it is, and I trust, Armstrong, that this money will enable you to get into the way of earning an honest livelihood. I cannot give you a character, but short of that I shall always be willing to give you a helping hand."

Paul, who had expected nothing more than his balance and cold words, was deeply touched. A man must be hardened, indeed, whose heart does not respond to an act of great and disinterested kindness, and Mr. Giltspur was heaping coals of fire on the outcast's head.

"You are too good, Mr. Giltspur," he said, in a voice trembling with genuine emotion. "I don't deserve it. You kill me with kindness. I thank you with all my heart. Nobody was ever so kind to me as you and Mrs. Giltspur. If it is not taking too great a liberty, I would ask you to thank her on my behalf, and say that I bitterly regret having abused your confidence—though it was only once, and I was hard pressed. I will try to do as you say, and earn an honest livelihood. Good-by, sir!"

Paul departed from the house which he might never enter more, a sadder, and perhaps a wiser, man, his heart wrung with keen remorse and vain regrets. But the fit did not last long, and he soon began to cast about in his mind as to the best way of turning his windfall to account.

He fully intended to act up to his promise of earning an honest livelihood, albeit his conception of the term would hardly have met with Mr. Giltspur's approval. For instance, he had often thought that the calling of bookmaker would suit him "down to the ground." It was a calling full of variety and movement, and judging from the bookies whom he had met at the Pelican and elsewhere, highly profitable. But as his capital was insufficient for that line of business, it behooved him to hit upon somthing else, and after reflection and inquiry he decided to set up as a racing prophet. He thought he could prophesy as well as anybody else, and was told on good authority that if a tipster only advertised freely and boldly he was sure to make a good thing of it. Nothing could be easier than to enter into relations with a tout or two, and he could pick up a good deal of information at the Pelican and at other sporting taverns.

When he had arrived at this resolution Paul took lodgings in the Grays' Inn Road, and began operations by inserting a florid advertisement in *Bell's Life*, the first of a series. At this time he spent most of his evenings at the Pelican, and there cultivated the acquaintance of several individuals who were likely to be useful to him in his new vocation. One night he stayed later than usual, until past one o'clock, and left the house alone, smoking a fine cigar, the gift of an intimate acquaintance: being

himself too penurious to spend money on aught so expensive.

Fleet Street was almost deserted, and after emerging from the court Paul stood for a moment on the curb, hesitating whether he should cross over to the other side where he was, or further on. He had decided for the former alternative, and was stepping on to the pavement when he heard stealthy footsteps behind him. Then a voice he knew cried fiercely: "Take that, you cursed traitor!" At the same moment a crushing blow fell on his head and Paul reeled, an inert mass, into the gutter.

CHAPTER XX.

To a storm succeeds a calm, and after the scare caused by Paul Armstrong's portentous reappearance the Clinchworthys enjoyed a period of peace, albeit not of absolute freedom from care. For though Mr. Clinchworthy had accepted the situation and, as it were, burned his boats, he had not quite reconciled his conscience to living with another man's wife, and trembled when he thought what a commotion there would be, both at the chapel and in the town, if the facts should come to light. But as touching the moral side of the question he presently received great comfort from a sermon by Mr. Atkinson, the new minister, an able and eloquent preacher, yet sometimes too metaphysical, not to say casuistical, for plain understandings. He was dealing with points of conscience, and argued that the rules of morality were binding without being absolute, that contingencies were conceivable in which Christians might rightly violate them.

Suicide was wrong; nevertheless, a man on board a burning ship would be justified in preferring voluntary death by water to involuntary death by fire. Circumstances were also conceivable in which a woman might rightfully take her own life. Murder was wrong, yet the execution of murderers was justified by the moral sense of mankind and upheld by Holy Writ, and though we might not lie to save our own lives, we might lawfully practice deception to save the lives of others

These theories were viewed with scant favor by the elders of the congregation. They savored too much of compromise, but Clinchworthy accepted them with avidity. They settled his dilemma and soothed his conscience. If in certain circumstances a man might lawfully break the sixth commandment, so might another break the seventh, and if there were ever a case of the sort it was his. Thenceforth James had no misgivings as to the morality of his conduct, and could he have been assured of his predecessor's continued absence would have had an easy mind. As regarded her conscience Mrs. Clinchworthy experienced no difficulty. Had she suspected that the report of Paul's death was untrue, nothing would have induced her to marry Clinchworthy, but having married him in good faith she regarded herself as his wife, and now that there was no question of separation felt comparatively happy. If the worst happened she would face it without fear. Her sole concern was for her husband, who thought so much of his position that its loss would well-nigh be the end of the world for him. But being blessed with a sanguine temperament and a cheerful disposition, she hoped for the best, and the home-coming of her eldest daughter presently gave her something more agreeable to think about than Paul Armstrong.

Kate Clinchworthy, who had just completed her education at a high-class finishing school, was a charming girl of eighteen, and it spoke well for her moral qualities that the finishing process had made her neither conceited nor affected, nor otherwise marred the native ingenuousness of her character. As regards her person she was of middle height, and though well-shaped, more plump than slender. Kate was not a beauty, but she had beautiful

brown eyes and a good complexion, a countenance so frank and open, and a manner so genial and sympathetic that everybody liked her, and Jack Armstrong, who had not seen the young lady since she was a gawky schoolgirl, lost his heart to her at their first meeting after her return, all the more readily and completely that, barring his passing penchant for Mlle. Hermance, he had not been in love for a long time.

It was about this time that Mark (between whom and Jack had sprung up a warm friendship), being in a confiding and somewhat despondent mood, confided to his younger brother his passion for the fascinating Suissesse.

"As if I didn't know!" said Jack, laughing.

"Know! How the deuce—— Why, I haven't told a soul," gasped Mark, whose face bespoke the extremity of surprise. "Come now, you are having me on the stick."

"I was never more serious in my life," returned his junior, still laughing. "I knew before I had been at home three days. When we had that carpet dance, and I paid a little attention to Mlle. Hermance, you first looked as fierce as a pot lion, and then as sulky as a bear. You were rude to her as we took her home, and more than rude to me when we got home. That was quite enough."

"I was a dratted fool that time," quoth Mark ruefully. "Do you think anybody else knows or suspects?"

"Nancy does. In fact, it was she who gave me the tip."

"But nobody else?"

"Nobody else, so far as I know."

"Well, so long as you two know, and it doesn't become the town's talk. I don't much care," said Mark, with a

sigh of relief. "But what think you I should do? It's a desperate case, Jack, and if Lucie won't have me, I shall be miserable all my days."

"Pluck up a spirit and pop the question."

"All very fine; but it wouldn't do. I know as well as I know my own name that she would refuse me, slap off. I feel it i' my bones. A big, clumsy, awkward, half-educated chap like me cannot hope to win the love of a refined and accomplished young lady like Lucie. And yet I have tried hard to improve myself. I study at nights when you are all abed. I have copied Cobbett's grammar out three times and committed most of it to memory, besides reading th' 'History of England,' Thiers' 'History of the Consulate,' and other books, and learning a lot of poetry by heart, Byron's for choice."

"And you have improved yourself more than you think. You can speak as correctly and write as good a letter as anybody I know."

"I'm afraid, though, that will not help me with Lucie," said Mark sorrowfully. "I have not got the gift of the gab. I am clumsy, my movements are heavy and awkward, and—and I don't shine a bit, not a bit. What must I do, Jack?"

"Poor old Mark! How can you expect to shine when you hide your light under a bushel! You must have a better conceit of yourself. Be less shy and more talkative, and as a cure for your slouching gait and that, learn to dance, and join the volunteers."

"What good would that do?"

"All the good in the world. Drill would straighten you out, set you up, and teach you how to walk; dancing will make you nimble and graceful."

"Me nimble and graceful!" exclaimed Mark, with a great laugh. "What are you talking about, lad?"

"I know what I am talking about. You try. Join my company,—I'll ask old Sergeant Pickingrod to do his best for you,—and arrange with Skipper to give you private dancing lessons. He has half a dozen daughters, and they'll help you along famously."

"Well, I will; I'll do owt for Lucie. Only don't say anything about th' dancing till I can do it well, and then I'll let 'em see. And I would like you to give me a lesson or two in French now and then, if you will."

"My word, Mark, you are going to have a lot of irons in the fire—drill, dancing, and French."

"Never mind. I'll tackle 'em all. Is there owt else?"

"Yes, read some novels. They'll give you subjects for conversation, besides developing your imagination, and girls read little else."

"All right. I'll subscribe to Mudie's library at Manchester and ask 'em to send me a half a hundredweight of recent fiction."

Mark carried out the scheme devised by his brother with energy and perseverance, and after a while the resulting improvement became quite perceptible, albeit being gradual it was not remarked by everybody. He carried himself better, walked with erect head and expanded chest, and drill and dancing together rid him of the superfluous flesh which had been the chief cause of the clumsiness of his appearance and the heaviness of his movements. He also grew more vivacious and talkative, while much polkaing, waltzing, and quadrilling with the six Misses Skipper, who were as nimble as cats and as bold as brass, well-nigh cured him of his shyness.

Mark performed for the first time in public at Miss Clinchworthy's party. Mlle. Hermance was probably never more surprised in her life than when this son of Belial, whom she had always regarded as *affreusement gauche*, asked her in fairly pronounced French to dance a schottische with him.

"*Ma foi, vous parlez Français!*" she exclaimed. "Since when did you learn it?"

Whereupon Mark, in a phrase prepared in anticipation of the question, explained that he had begun to learn the language only a few months previously, and craved her indulgence for his mistakes and shortcomings.

"But you speak it wonderfully well," quoth she. "I am quite surprised that you have learned so much in so short a time. Certainly, I shall be very pleased to dance the schottische with you."

This, although she had no great confidence in her cavalier's capacity, and feared he would either tread on her toes or tear her gown. But Mark acquitted himself well, and when the dance was over escorted his partner to a seat, and made his bow with a grace that left nothing to be desired. A little while afterward they were *vis-à-vis* in a quadrille, and it struck Mlle. Hermance for the first time that her erstwhile cavalier was distinctly the finest man in the room. The loss of his adipose tissue increased his apparent height, and though broad-shouldered and strong-limbed he looked neither clumsy nor coarse, his head was well set on, and his face, though not handsome, good-natured and all smiles.

Lucie admired strong men, and she began to take an interest in "Mr. Mark," as she always called him. After the quadrille they had a polka, and sat out the next dance. Mark, highly elated by his companion's

complaisance, took a leading part in the conversation, and, *à propos* of memorable balls, recited in a low voice, yet with much animation, Byron's famous description of the Duchess of Richmond's ball on the night before the battle of Waterloo.

"My faith, Mr. Mark, you are becoming quite an Admirable Crichton," said Lucie jestingly. "You know history, you recite poetry, you dance admirably, and I heard some one say the other day that you are a smart officer of volunteers. How hard you must have been working. All out of a passion for improvement, I suppose?"

"No, a still stronger passion."

"Indeed! What passion is that?"

"Cannot you guess?"

Lucie looked at him wonderingly, then a bright blush overspread her face, and turning aside, she trifled nervously with her fan.

"I have broken the ice at last, and she understands me," thought Mark, with a thrill of delight. But as Frank Clinchworthy just then came up to claim Lucie for the next dance, he could not follow up the advantage, even though his courage had been equal to the occasion.

Mlle. Hermance was not the only person at the party whom Mark's proficiency as a dancer and new-born *savoir faire* surprised. Mrs. Clinchworthy complimented him, Miss Clinchworthy beamed on him, divers of his friends chaffed him, and Jack whispered in his ear:

"Well done, old fellow! Go in and win. Didn't I tell you?"

Said young Sprotson, a Whitebrook *jeunesse dorée*, whose grandfather had kept a rag and bone shop, to

young Brimmer, the son of an ex-barman, who had made a fortune by vending spirituous liquors:

"Wonders never cease! There is Mark Armstrong parleyvooing with Mlle. Hermance, and dancing like a cat in pattens."

"And he used to be such a lout; couldn't say 'boo' to a goose. My word, Old Belial's sons are coming out," returned Brimmer.

"Especially Luke," said Sprotson, with a sarcastic laugh.

"Yes; Luke is a hot cup of tea—nearly always on the loose."

"What better can you expect from a fellow of his origin? Scratch an Armstrong, and you will find a molder. It is as much as old Matt can do to write his name."

"I once heard a whisper that somebody belonging to them was convicted of something or other, and sent to Botany Bay. Do you think it's true?"

"Very likely, I should say. Upstarts generally do have low connections. Anyhow, there is a drunkard, who is also a gambler, in the family, and that is almost as bad. They are rightly called Sons of Belial," answered Sprotson, and Brimmer smiled assent, probably out of sympathy with his friend, whose firm (Sprotson, Sons & Co.) had been the biggest machine makers in Whitebrook until "Old Belial" gave them the go-by.

CHAPTER XXI.

As touching its exterior, the Three Pigeons was an unobtrusively shabby public house, in a narrow street abutting on the dark and high-smelling stream wherefrom the town derived its name, a favor which the town returned by turning it into a main sewer. Then, either feeling ashamed of their ingratitude, or disliking the perfume, the authorities buried the once white brook under a vault, and the historic runnel disappeared forever.

The name of the innkeeper, as set forth on the sign, was "John Longstaff," but his customers had rechristened him "Falstaff," and being burly, big-bellied, bewhiskered, and red-faced, he looked the part, and unless rumor belied him, tried to live up to it.

The Three Pigeons was more inviting within than without. To the left of the entrance lobby were a cozy, old-fashioned bar and bar parlor, presided over by the buxom landlady, and redolent of rum, whisky, and lemons. To the right, a commodious commercial room. But the distinctive feature of the house was the wide, winding, oaken-railed staircase. It had nearly as many stages as a man has ages. On the first was a huge kitchen with a fireplace nearly big enough to roast an ox, and quite big enough to roast a sheep. On the second, a sitting room, where, on market days, farmers' and country manufacturers' wives sipped port wine negus and talked gossip, while their husbands in the bar parlor below talked shop and drank grog. On the third, a door gave access to a

tortuous passage, at the end whereof was another door opening into a room known to its frequenters as "Number Nine," and for reasons which will presently appear nicknamed by profane outsiders "The Devil's Parlor." A large, comfortable room, well supplied with easy chairs and small tables. The walls were adorned with racing pictures and portraits of sporting celebrities, and in one corner hung a bell, the precise use of which was not obvious to the uninitiated.

On a certain night several months after Mrs. Clinchworthy's party, Number Nine was occupied by some ten or twelve men, mostly young, of whom several were tranquilly smoking and drinking. Others were playing dice and "carding," and the gold and silver coins that gleamed on the table, and the banknotes which occasionally changed hands, showed that they were not playing for love. There was little noise, partly because the gamesters were too intent on their play for much talk, partly because their desire was rather to avoid, than attract, attention, and loud voices might be heard in the street below. For then, as well as now, gambling in public houses was illegal, and though the police were either less vigilant or more easily squared, Longstaff, alias Falstaff, neglected no precaution which might secure his sporting customers from annoyance and himself from being "caught napping." Nobody was allowed to go upstairs whom he did not know personally, or as to whose good faith he entertained the slightest doubt, and he had the means of warning the gamblers when danger threatened.

Shortly before eleven on the night in question, Luke Armstrong sauntered into the "Devil's Parlor," followed by several companions who, like himself, were not quite

as sober as they might have been. His face was flushed, his hat on one side, his manner reckless and defiant.

"Who's for a game of *vingt-et-un?*" he asked, as he threw his hat on the floor and himself into an easy-chair.

Another man proposed loo, still another poker, but Luke carried his point, and a party of five, one of them Brimmer, was formed to play the game which he preferred.

"How about the stakes? What limit shall we say?" asked one of them.

"Nobody to stake less than five bob, and as much more as he likes," answered Luke, and the others, seeing that he was in a mood which portended loss for him and gain for them, laughed assent.

But they had no sooner got fairly to work than the bell in the corner rang out a loud note of alarm, whereupon money and cards disappeared "like winking," and the players, turning their chairs and lighting their pipes, tried to look as little like sinners and as much like saints as might be. A moment afterward the door opened and the burly landlord appeared at the threshold.

"It's all right, gentlemen! Nobbut a false alarm," he announced, in a loud whisper.

"To the —— with your false alarm!" exclaimed Luke angrily. "You have spoiled my game; I was on the win."

"Very sorry, but I couldn't do no different, Mr. Armstrong. A bobby came into th' house, and as I didn't like his looks, and thought there must be more outside, I tipped my wife a wink to ring th' bell. But he made no bother, and I reckon I gav' him what he wanted."

"And that was?"

"A noggin o' rum."

On which Falstaff withdrew and the gamblers renewed their interrupted play. But it was destined to be a night of surprises and alarms, for presently the door opened again and in came Harry Ainslie, who had the reputation of being the cheekiest chap in Whitebrook, a saucy-looking young fellow with a handsome face and jaunty air, and evidently "a bit sprung."

"Well, lads, at it again?" he said, addressing the company generally, with easy nonchalance. Then to Luke: "How goes it, Belial? You are in the right shop to-night—the family parlor."

Now, the word "Belial" had much the same effect on Luke as a red rag has on a bull. It made him mad. Uttering an oath, he sprang to his feet, kicked away his chair, and with one blow of his brawny fist sent the insulter flying.

Thereupon dire confusion.

The cause of it was up in an instant, and rushed wildly at Luke, who had meanwhile doffed his coat and put himself in an attitude of defense. He was a born fighter, and it would have fared ill with his antagonist if several men had not gathered round him, while two or three others seized Luke's arms. But he fought hard to free himself, one of his friends helping, and in the struggle tables were overturned and chairs broken and whirled in all directions, to the accompaniment of shouts, hot words, and excited exclamations. In the midst of the uproar the landlord, accompanied by Mark and Jack Armstrong, hurriedly entered the room, shut the door, and turned the key. Falstaff looked very irate, and his appearance produced an immediate effect.

"For shame, gentlemen! For shame!" he cried. "Do you want to have the police here? If they come—

and you're making din enough to be heard a mile off—they'll march you all to th' lock-up. Besides, it's not fair to me. I let you gam' here on th' understanding as you'll keep as quiet as you can and do nowt to get me into trouble. Do you call this keeping quiet?"

"It's all Luke Armstrong's fault. He deserves turning out," said one of the gamblers.

"Not it. Ainslie began it," said another.

"I care not who began it. I want it ended, and if there's any more on't I'll turn th' gas off and send you all home," returned the landlord. "Bithmon, I think you had better go now, and then if th' police does come—— Th' bell, by gum! Get them cards out o' sight, some on you."

But before the order could be obeyed the door was burst open and three constables, one of them an inspector, marched in, while two others guarded the passage. During Falstaff's absence from his post they had stolen into the house unobserved, and were halfway upstairs before the people in the bar were aware of the raid and could give the alarm.

There was no need to ask questions. The cards and money on the floor, and the dice and dice box on the table that had kept on its legs, told their own tale. The inspector ordered his men to take possession of these "pieces of conviction," while their abashed owners looked gloomily on.

"You will hear of this again, Mr. Longstaff," he observed to the host when the work was done. "And now I must take down the names of these gentlemen"—producing a notebook. "I think I know them all."

Here Mark Armstrong explained that he and his

brother John had been in the room only a few minutes, and had neither gambled nor intended to gamble.

"I know nothing about that, Mr. Armstrong. All I know is that you are here, and your names must go down with the rest," answered the inspector quietly. "I think that is all"—glancing at his men. "Good-night, gentlemen!"

The detected gamblers looked crestfallen, some of them dismayed.

"Do you think they will subpœna us all?" inquired a white-faced youth, who had left the paternal mansion by the back door after his father, decent man, had retired to rest in the happy belief that Samuel—who was so steady—was sleeping the sleep of the just.

"What matter if you are? That will n't hurt you," answered the landlord scornfully. "It's me as will catch it; and seeing as it's all your fault it 'll be an infernal shame if you let me lose owt. But there's one thing sure, there must be no more carding here till this has blown over. You'll have to find a devil's parlor somewhere else. Are you ready? I'm going to turn th' gas off."

Luke made less difficulty about being taken home than his brothers had anticipated. He was always refractory when under the influence of drink. But the row and the domiciliary visit had partially restored his senses.

"How did you know where I was?" he asked, when they were under way.

"Well, as you neither came home last night nor showed up at the shop to-day, my mother got fidgety, and would have Jack and me try to find you. After drawing the Bull and two or three other pubs., blank, we ran you to ground in Number Nine. But if it had been left to us

you may be sure we shouldn't have taken th' trouble," said Mark bitterly; and then, dropping into the vernacular: "I have reasoned wi' thee and borne wi' thee, and besought thee to be steady till I am fair sick. But it is just as my father says, one mut as weel talk to a factory chimney; and thou may go thy own gait for owt as I care. Thou cannot disgrace us more than thou has done. Our names will get into th' papers and folk will think we are just as bad as thee."

To which Luke had nothing to say. At any rate he said nothing.

When Matthew heard what had happened he was furious, and there was a stormy interview between his prodigal son and himself. But the storming was all on one side. Luke, as was his wont when reproached or reproved, sitting stolidly, with bent head, and dumb as though he were tongue-tied. Nothing in the way of words seemed to move him. Only when his mother talked to him sorrowfully and wept did he show signs of penitence and make promises of amendment, which were never kept more than a few days or weeks.

When Matthew stopped his scolding for want of breath, Luke raised his head and said sullenly, yet not disrespectfully: "Have you done, father? If you have, I'll go."

"Ay, get thee gone and never come back," said the father, now more enraged than ever.

Luke went first to the shop, where he drew a hundred pounds—his own money—and thence to the railway station.

CHAPTER XXII.

When Mrs. Armstrong heard what had passed between her husband and her son, and that Luke had been seen in a train going north, she was greatly concerned, and as he returned neither the next day nor the next after that her concern increased.

"Oh, that lad, what if he never comes back?" she exclaimed. "Who knows as he hasn't gone to America?"

"No such luck," answered her husband grimly. "Never thee fear, he'll come back when his brass is done, and it is a good job he went. He had not been gone an hour when a policeman came with a subpœna, and if he had had to give evidence it would ha' made bad waur—if owt could be waur."

In the meanwhile Falstaff had been summoned before the local bench and heavily fined for knowingly permitting gambling on his premises. Several of the gamblers had to appear in the witness-box, much against their will, and the names of all who were present when the police made their raid "got into the papers," to the great disgust of the two who were innocent, the more so as without washing their dirty linen out of doors they could not explain how they came to be mixed up in so unsavory a scandal.

Save by friends who knew the facts, Mark and Jack were regarded as regular frequenters of the Devil's Parlor and true Sons of Belial. Though not the first trouble Luke had got them into, it was the worst, and they

would not have been sorry if, as their mother feared, he had gone to America—or anywhere else provided it was far enough.

Matthew's forecast was sooner verified than any of them expected. Reckless as Luke was, they did not think he would get through a hundred pounds in little over a week; more, indeed, for he had left the Three Pigeons with money in his pocket.

But one night at the end of the week after his disappearance, as the family were sitting in the "house part," and thinking of going to bed, a maid opened the door, and announced in an intense whisper that Mr. Luke had just come in and gone upstairs.

"Fot him, Mark and Jack," ordered their father; "and if he makes any bother bring him by th' scruff of his neck." Then to his wife and daughter: "Go you two to bed."

"You will n't be hard on him, Matthew," said Mrs. Armstrong imploringly.

"Not half as hard as he has been on us. I'll not turn him out of doors, if that's what thou means. I have promised that before. But I mean to be th' mayster both here and at th' shop. Go!"

The order was obeyed, and Luke was presently led into the room by his brothers.

"Leave us," said Matthew to Mark and Jack. "Sit down, Luke."

Matthew eyed the prodigal sternly, and not without surprise. Never had this Son of Belial looked so woebegone and undone. All his old sullenness seemed to be gone. His lips twitched and trembled, his face was white and drawn, his air submissive and subdued. Luke was suffering from the physical depression that comes of

excess in a more acute form than he had ever experienced before, intensified by hunger and fatigue, possibly also by a new-born sense of the enormity of his conduct.

"Where hast thou been?" asked his father.

"Liverpool, and twothry other places."

"And thou has come back because thy brass is done, I reckon?"

Luke made a gesture of assent.

"And thy watch, has that gone, too?" pointing to his son's waistcoat, from which the accustomed heavy gold chain was conspicuously absent.

"Ay."

"Why, thou must have got through a matter of a hundred and forty or fifty pounds in ten days. How did thou spend it?"

"Betting, carding, and women. I went to th' races, and got among a bad lot as cheated me. I have been a most terrible foo'," returned Luke, with unwonted frankness.

"Thou has been that a long while—and waur. I'm not going to sauce thee, it's like throwing water on a duck's back. And I don't ask thee to consider me and thy brothers and sisters, and th' disgrace thou art bringing on us all. But thou might have some pity on thy mother. Hoo has done a good deal for thee. It's killing her. I never saw such a change i' anybody i' my life. Hoo isn't like th' same. Hoo cannot sleep in her bed, and I never come on her unawares as I don't find her in tears; her as used to be so resolute and strong."

Luke raised his head and tried to say something, but the words refused to come.

"But them as will n't be bent must be broken. Thou has getten to th' end of thy tether at last. Th' hun-

dred pounds as thou drew last week didn't leave as much to thy credit as will buy thee a new suit o' clothes; and I have altered my will. I had left th' concern, as it stands, to you three brothers, share and share alike. But I have added a codicil revoking all dispositions in thy favor, and authorizing my executors to make thee any allowance, not exceeding three pounds a week, as they in their discretion may think fit. I promised thy mother as I wouldn't turn thee out o' doors. But I'll not have thee at th' shop."

"Not have me at th' shop!" exclaimed Luke, in dire consternation. "You surely wouldn't bag me, father?"

"There's nowt else for it. How can a man as goes on th' boil for a week at a time do his work, either as a master or a servant, to say nowt of th' example? I have said it, and I mean it."

Luke leaned his elbows on his knees and put his head between his hands.

"Bagged, beggared, and disinherited!" he moaned.

"Well, thou has nobody to blame but thysel'," said Matthew coldly.

"That's true, and I am a shame and a sorrow to all of you. I know it well, nobody knows it better. But I am your own lad, after all, father. Gi'e me another chance. For my mother's sake gi'e me another chance. I'll keep steady. I'll sign teetotal. I'll do owt as you want. I'll work for nowt. Only don't bag me just like a common hand."

This appeal, spoken with the eloquence of genuine felling and in a voice broken with emotion, touched Matthew, and he reflected long before answering, while Luke tried to read his fate in his father's face.

"I cannot have thee back at th' shop, that's settled," he said at length, resolutely, yet in a more kindly manner. "Leastways, till thou has proved thy sincerity by summat more than words. But there is happen a way: Thou used to be good lad, and nobody could have been steadier or worked harder till we geet agate a-getting on, and I made you lads managers and gave you salaries, and the better I have done the worse thou has done. Thou mun leave Whitebrook for a while and descend into th' ranks. Put thy pride into thy pocket, take a stick and a bundle, and get a shop,—anywhere so long as it's far enough,—sign teetotal and live on thy wage. If thou keeps steady for a twelvemonth I'll give thee another chance, and if you shapes right happen cancel that codicil."

"I offered to do what you bade me, and I am going to be as good as my word," said Luke, after thinking a while. "It 'll be hard, but I'll do it."

"The way of transgressors is hard," observed Matthew, quoting Scripture, probably for the first time in his life, "and unless thou art made to smart thou'll never mend. But as thou has made up thy mind to it we'll say no more about that. Thou had better have a couple of days rest before thou sets off. Thou looks base ill."

"I may weel, seeing as I have walked fro' Ormskirk on an empty belly."

"The deuce thou has! How was that?"

"I hadn't enough to pay my way further. I slept in a hayfield, and all I have had since yesternoon is half a loaf o' bread and a pennyworth o' milk."

"Didn't I say as th' way o' transgressors is hard? Well, go into th' buttery, and get summat; th' lasses is gone to bed. There's beer in th' cellar."

"Nay, I'll have no beer. If I have to be teetotal I may as well begin now."

Luke went into the buttery and came back with a loaf of bread, a chunk of cheese, and a glass of water. When he had nearly finished his repast an idea occurred to him.

"What will folks say?" he asked.

"They may say what they like," replied the father, "and as far as that goes they can say no waur than they are doing. If anybody axes after thee I'll say as thy health has broken down and I've sent thee to a water cure. And it would be as well for thee to drop half thy name."

"What do you mean?"

"Call thyself Strong, so as if I ask thy employer for thy character he will n't know as we are owt akin, and we can write to thee without anybody being any wiser."

"Just as you like, father. Talking o' names reminds me of a thing I have to tell you. When I went into th' betting ring on th' cup day I saw a bookmaker's sign wi' Armstrong & Co. on it, though th' company didn't seem to be there. Well, I spoke to him."

"And betted wi' him?"

"Ay, I backed one horse to win—and another for a place, and lost by both. 'Your name's same as mine,' says I, when we had talked a bit.

"'The deuce it is! Where are you from?' says he.

"'We live at Whitebrook, but our folks comes out o' Furness,' says I. 'Where are you from?'

"He said he lived at London, and then asked if my father was alive, and what his Christian name was. When I had told him he said as he had once known a Matthew Armstrong as kept a pub., Preston way.

"'That couldn't be my father,' says I, 'he's an iron-founder and machine maker, and never kept a pub. in his life.'"

"Well, thou art a gobbin! But when drink goes in sense goes out, and thou never had too much," exclaimed Matthew contemptuously.

The reproach, which he considered undeserving, stung Luke to the quick.

"What am I a gobbin for?" he demanded sullenly.

"For letting a stranger pump thee dry, just because he called hissel' Armstrong. I have heard say as th' last name them bookies thinks o' taking is their own. Did he tell thee who his father was and what he did?"

"I never asked him. But I know one thing; if I had taken his advice I shouldn't have getten into such a hobble."

"Ay, how wor that?"

"He had seen me i' th' company of two or three chaps as I had fallen in with i' Liverpool, and he said they were a bad lot, and advised me to drop their acquaintance."

"An' thou neglected his warning and lost thy money?"

"Ay; they did not leave me enough to pay my way home. But as you said just now, th' drink was in and th' sense was out, or I shouldn't ha' been such a foo'."

"Well, it was kind o' th' bookie to warn thee, anyhow. All th' same, I don't think his gradely name was Armstrong. But get thee to bed. It's welly eleven o'clock, and be ready to start o' Tuesday morning—I'll make it reyt wi' thy mother."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THERE could be little, if any, question, thought Matthew, that the bookmaker who had first betted with Luke, and then given him good advice, was Paul, the outcast. Nevertheless, there was so much room for doubt as to render certainty unattainable. Armstrongs are not as rare as dukes, and the man's motive for questioning Luke might be mere curiosity, prompted by the similarity of names. Moreover, it seemed so strange as to be incredible that the penniless tramp of three or four years ago should have bloomed into a bookie within a few months of the encounter in Otsford & Bollivant's shop.

Bookies who frequent big race meetings are capitalists, and according to Mark's testimony this particular Armstrong was particularly flush, "seemed to have as many banknotes about him as a bank."

"It caps me altogether," soliloquized Matthew. "If it isn't him why did he ax Luke so many questions, and want to know my Christian name, and get th' silly gobbin to tell him what I did by saying he once knew a chap of th' same name as kept a pub. Preston way? If it is him, how did he come by that brass? He must ha' stolen it. I'll lay my life he never addled it. However, there's one good thing—if it is Paul, and I think it is, he's less likely than ever to turn up at Whitebrook. He knows me too well to think as I'll stand being blackmailed. So far as I am concerned he may do his worst. But he could

make it hot for th' Clinchworthys, for twist and turn it as you like, Susan is his wife, and he is her master, and if he finds it out he'll have either her or his price—though it wouldn't do to say as much to her or Jimmy—unless we can draw his teeth somehow. Happen he will n't find it out. But they are at the mercy of accidents, and as he is going about th' country continual, and meeting folk in railway carriages and on race courses, it's much if he doesn't light on some fool like our Luke, as will either give him a clew or blab it out, and Jimmy is a good deal afore th' public."

After further reflection Matthew, who was both a bit of a philosopher and a bit of a fatalist, came to the sage conclusion that, as he was powerless to avert the catastrophe which he feared, and the future was beyond his ken, the best thing he could do was to dismiss the subject from his mind—"bother no more about it till summat happens," meanwhile keeping his apprehensions strictly to himself.

On the Tuesday morning, Luke, having recovered from the effects of his long walk and expensive spree, set out on his quest for work, dressed like a mechanic, and equipped with a stick, a bundle, and a sovereign—from his father—which his mother surreptitiously doubled.

Matthew had "made it reyt" with his wife by pointing out that if the scapegrace remained in Whitebrook "at a loose end," he would go from bad to worse, while to send him on his travels amply supplied with money, and "nowt to do," could only end in trouble.

Luke's strange disappearance was a nine days' wonder in the town, and gave rise to rumors each more absurd than the other. But the Armstrongs declined to throw

any light on the mystery, rather, indeed, darkening by obscure answers. Matthew stuck to his text. To inquiries as to what had become of his missing son, his invariable reply was: "Th' lad wasn't so weel, and has gone to a water cure."

When questioned as to the locality of the cure he would say, with the utmost gravity, "I have forgotten th' name on it, but it isn't far fro' London."

The Clinchworthys were rather annoyed at being kept in the dark like other folk, and one day Mrs. Clinchworthy, who "liked to know things," and had conceived the ridiculous idea that Luke's disappearance had something to do with his rascally uncle, examined Jack closely on the subject.

"I know that it is a delicate matter," said she. "Your brother has not been exactly a credit to the family. All the same, I don't think he is as bad as people make out, and they are saying all sorts of things about him, and it is very painful not to be able to contradict them."

"What are they saying?" queried Jack.

"Everything. That he is in a lunatic asylum, that he has gone off with a disreputable girl—they even mention her name, that he has robbed the concern of several thousand pounds and absconded to America, that after a terrible scene with your father he went to Manchester and committed suicide. A body that could not be identified was found the other day in the Irwell."

"You may contradict these rumors with a safe conscience, Mrs. Clinchworthy; they are all lies."

"Of course I never believed them for a moment. I am only telling you what people say, but if I knew what had become of him I could speak with authority.

Where is he, Jack? You may trust me. I won't tell anybody, not even my husband."

"'Pon my word, Mrs. Clinchworthy, I no more know where Luke is at this moment than you do."

"That is only fencing. Nobody knows exactly where anybody is who is not in sight. But you know where Luke is gone, or supposed to be."

"Not even that. The simple truth is that Luke is gone on a walking tour."

"Your father says he is gone to a water cure."

"Well, a man may walk to a water cure, mayn't he? Or try to cure himself by drinking water and taking walks?"

"You are trifling with me, Jack. You might at least say where his water cure establishment is."

"I would if I could."

"You mean you won't."

"I mean that I don't know, therefore cannot say. My father has told me no more than he has told you. If you want further information you must apply to him."

"I think I understand. You are forbidden to tell, and I cannot blame you for obeying your father. All the same, I think he might trust me. However, if he won't he won't, and there's no use saying any more about it," observed Mrs. Clinchworthy, in a tone of disappointment. "Let us change the subject. I want a governess for Clara and May, and am asking my friends if they can help me, and as you go about so much, and have friends in the south, I thought you might, through them, or otherwise, hear of a likely young person. I could advertise, of course, but it would be so much more satisfactory to have somebody who can be recommended

by people you know. And I want not merely a governess for the little girls, but a well-bred accomplished lady, who would make a nice companion for Kate, and help her with her studies, for I should like her to keep up her French, and music, and that."

"I think I know somebody who would suit you down to the ground," said Jack, bethinking him of Polly Perkins, who of late had been very little in his mind; and then he told Mrs. Clinchworthy all he knew of Mr. Livermore's niece.

"Exactly the person!" exclaimed Mrs. Clinchworthy delightedly. "But do you think she would come?"

"That will have to be ascertained. When I called at Ashcombe three months ago, as I returned from France, I heard that Miss Perkins was not very comfortable in her present situation, from which I imagine that she would. But you had better write to Mr. Livermore, whom you might at the same time ask whether he thinks she would suit you. It would be well to have his opinion, and it will be given as conscientiously as though Polly—Miss Perkins—were nothing akin to him."

"You are very friendly with Polly, I suppose?" said Mrs. Clinchworthy, with a knowing smile.

"I have not seen her for three or four years."

"You were very friendly with her, I should say?"

"Not more than any of the other fellows in the first class."

"And did they all address her as Polly?"

"Not exactly. She would have given them what for. But they all spoke of her as Polly."

"Well, I will write to Mr. Livermore, as you suggest, though I am quite satisfied with your description of the young lady"

The letter was written and promptly answered. Mr. Livermore's account of Polly's qualifications was eminently satisfactory, and it pleased Mrs. Clinchworthy to learn that in all probability his niece would respond favorably to her overtures. He had advised her to do so, and suggested that Mrs. Clinchworthy should correspond directly with Miss Perkins on the subject.

This Mrs. Clinchworthy did, with the result that Miss Perkins accepted her offer, and agreed to her terms, which were quite as liberal as she had a right to expect, though less so than she thought she deserved, and had hoped to obtain.

In her first letter Polly had rather demurred to going to Lancashire, hinting that she greatly preferred London, and that parting with her pupils would be a trial. This, however, was pretense, put on to increase her importance and Mrs. Clinchworthy's desire to secure her services. In reality she was eager to go, and would not have missed the chance for a good deal. She detested her pupils, and though she liked giving lessons to intelligent learners, disliked teaching young children. True, she would have to teach at Whitebrook, but teaching two girls of ten and twelve and reading with a well-educated young lady would be very different from teaching four brats, two of them unruly little boys, who were never off her hands except when they were in bed. Moreover, at the Clinchworthys' she was to be treated as one of the family. At the Stranges' she had been treated as a pariah, and only the fear that she would not easily get another engagement, and her resolve on no consideration to become a burden on her uncle, had restrained her from leaving long before.

Polly's servitude had altered her character, and not

for the better. She had lost the most of her youthful illusions and was become pessimistic and cynical. The world had not responded to her expectations. No rich suitor had made her an offer of his hand and laid his fortune at her feet. The accomplishments and acquirements on which she so greatly prided herself had brought her little or no consideration. Save when she went to Ashcombe for her holidays, her life was a dull round of drudgery, and never a day passed that the Stranges, whom she despised for their ignorance and hated for their ostentation, did not let her see that they held their governess in less esteem than their butler and their cook.

These things made Polly set even a higher value on money than she had done, and her desire for wealth and the power and independence which they confer increased with the apparent hopelessness of obtaining them.

But her new engagement revived her spirits and rekindled her courage. At the Clinchworthys' she would not be sent to the schoolroom when there was company in the drawing room. And she would renew her friendship with Jack Armstrong, whom she now bitterly regretted having treated so cavalierly. Had she been kinder his boyish love might have grown into an enduring passion, and she had heard at Ashcombe that he had a good income and fair prospects. Whether he was still enamored of her was another question. She rather feared not. A hobbledehoy's love seldom survives absence and adolescence, and since their parting Jack had made no sign. But he was not the only eligible young fellow at Whitebrook, and with her attractions, mental and physical (which perhaps she somewhat exaggerated) it would be strange if she could not captivate a suitable *parti*.

In this Polly tried to persuade herself there was nothing wrong. What could be more natural than for a girl without fortune and home to make marriage her aim? If men were allowed to choose their mates for qualities so superficial and adventitious as beauty and wealth why should women not be equally privileged? What was sauce for the gander should be sauce for the goose.

From which it will be seen that, before the question became burning, Miss Perkins had formed decided views as to the equality of the sexes and the rights of women.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Miss Perkins did not enter on her duties so soon as she would have liked and Mrs. Clinchworthy desired. Her employers insisted on their pound of flesh, that is to say, three months' notice, which Polly thought very hard, though it was a condition of their contract, and she would have been highly indignant had Mrs. Strange sent her away without the stipulated warning. But women with judicial minds are as rare as black swans, and no truth is more generally overlooked than that to every question there are two sides.

After the expiration of the notice came the holidays, and it was not until four months after her engagement that Polly arrived at Whitebrook. As she did not expect to find it a city of palaces, and had already seen Manchester and caught a glimpse of Bolton, she was not distressed by Whitebrook's grimy looks and murky air, and the warm welcome which she received at Brookfield House more than reconciled her to the change from south to north.

Mrs. Clinchworthy took a motherly interest in the motherless girl, whose spirited resolve (of which she had heard from Jack Armstrong) to earn her own living she greatly admired.

Polly, on her part, conceived a warm liking for Mrs. Clinchworthy at their first interview, and also felt sure she should like Miss Clinchworthy and Clara and May, though their northern accent rather grated on her

southern ear. In fact, she was in a mood to like everybody, even Mr. Clinchworthy, who likewise welcomed her, albeit in a somewhat patronizing fashion.

"I hope we shall be good friends, my dear young lady; nay, I am sure we shall, and that your labors in my family will be abundantly blessed," said he, holding her hand and beaming on her benignly.

Which Polly thought rather peculiar, but it was kindly meant, and more than ever Mr. Strange had said to her.

Next came Frank's turn.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Perkins. You have been long in coming. I hope you will be very much longer in going," he said, smiling pleasantly; and it was well said, and the young man was good-looking, and no doubt potentially, if not actually, rich, nevertheless, as Polly surmised, rather conceited. But in an only son with expectations this was a fault neither singular nor serious. He would make a useful understudy for Jack; failing the one she might try to captivate the other, meanwhile endeavoring to make herself agreeable to the family at large, and being naturally bright and obliging she soon became a general favorite.

Mrs. Clinchworthy had made her feel at home from the first, and the daughter of the house and herself became good friends.

It was a matter of course that they should talk about the Armstrongs. Jack was a common friend, he had been the means of bringing Miss Perkins to Whitebrook, and she learned pretty nearly all about him and his people which Mrs. Clinchworthy had to tell, and she cared to know—among other things, that Mr. Armstrong was a "character" and one of the most successful men in Whitebrook. How much he was worth Mrs.

Clinchworthy could not tell, but people said it ran into six figures, and the concern, which was growing, would eventually go to Mark and Jack, perhaps even during their father's life-time, for he had lately told Mr. Clinchworthy that if the lads continued to shape as they were doing, he should turn the business over to them, and give all his time to the further impovement of Cobster Nook and of some additional land which he had recently bought.

The second son, Luke, was a black sheep. Nobody but his own folk knew where he was and as they refused to reveal the secret, even to their closest friends, it was to be feared that he was gone utterly to the bad.

Jack was active, enterprising and steady—so many young men were not steady. He made frequent business visits to the Continent, and was then in Russia. Polly, on her part, gave an amusing account of Jack's first appearance at Ashcombe—of his blunt speech and uncouth manners, his cleverness at arithmetic and ignorance of everything else, of his famous fight with Farley, and much besides.

To these conversations, whereof there were many, Miss Clinchworthy listened attentively without saying much—often, indeed, taking up a book or a paper as if the subject bored her. Which set Polly wondering whether the young lady's indifference was real or feigned, though had any other man been in question the circumstance might not have attracted her attention. But nothing is so sharp-eyed as rivalry; and albeit Polly was not in love with Jack Armstrong, he had been in love with her, and she meant to use her best efforts—of course in a strictly maidenly way—to re-kindle the flame on which she had once thrown cold water, as much because she liked him

better than any other man she knew, as that his position and prospects rendered him a pecuniarily eligible *parti*.

But if Kate and Jack were at all "gone" on each other, Polly was building castles in the air, for Kate was a winsome girl, and Jack, unless he had greatly altered, an amorous young fellow, and nothing could be more natural than that they should make a match of it.

This was discouraging, and so evident, that Miss Polly accused herself of stupidity in not thinking of it sooner. Nevertheless, she had no idea of throwing up the sponge before the battle was begun, and it is always a mistake to make hasty inductions. They had talked so much about the Armstrongs that Miss Clinchworthy might well be weary of the subject, and her indifference sincere—or the liking, if liking there were, all on one side.

Before long Jack Armstrong returned from his travels, and on the Sunday afternoon following his arrival called at Brookfield House. As it happened, he found Polly practically alone. She was reading under a tree in the garden. Clara and May were chasing butterflies. Mr. and Miss Clinchworthy were at the Sunday school, Mrs. Clinchworthy was in the house, and Frank had gone out for a walk.

"Delighted to see you, Polly—or shall it be Miss Perkins?" asked Jack, as they shook hands.

"Polly, if you like, when we are alone; Miss Perkins when we are not," said she, smiling pleasantly.

"Agreed! May a fellow smoke?" sitting down in a rustic chair and producing a cigar.

"By all means. I like the perfume of a cigar."

"Here goes then"—striking a match. "I think, though, I once heard you say at Ashcombe that you detested smoking."

"A great many things have happened since then, Jack. It is not four years since we parted, but I feel as though it were a lifetime," returned Polly, sighing.

"You were not very happy in your last shop, I am afraid."

"Wretched, I was nothing better than a slave."

"Why didn't you cut it, then?"

"Because the alternative was becoming a burden on my uncle, and perhaps being a long time without a situation. A governess who does not stay long in a place, especially her first place, has always great difficulty in getting another; and Mrs. Strange was so spiteful that I felt sure she would either refuse to give me a character or give me one so equivocal as to be worse than useless. A girl who has to get her own living has much to put up with, Jack."

"Yes, she is rather heavily handicapped."

"I don't think it is fair. Well-educated young women haven't half the chances of young men. They have no career, and only one way of earning their bread—by teaching, and not all have a gift for teaching."

"They can marry."

"Sometimes. It is not everyone who gets the chance," said Polly dryly.

"And some who get the chance don't take advantage of it," rejoined Jack significantly.

This was coming to rather close quarters, and Polly was thinking how she might turn the opening to account without seeming too forward when Jack turned the subject by asking her, *apropos* of nothing in particular, how she liked her new place.

"Immensely," she said brightly. "They are all so kind. Compared with my last shop, as you call it, it is

like heaven. I am so much obliged to you for thinking of me, Jack. It is to you that I owe my good fortune."

"Well, I had promised, you know, and when Mrs. Clinchworthy mentioned that she wanted a governess for Clara and May I thought of you."

"Only then! Until reminded, he had forgotten me; that does not sound well," was Polly's mental comment.

"How do you get on with old Clinch?" added Jack.

"You mean Mr. Clinchworthy? Very well. He is rather patronizing at times, but though a Dissenter, not by any means a bad man, and really very kind."

"I dare say. All the same, he is just a bit too much of a psalm-singer for me. It is a fad of his to give advice, and that is a commodity of which one may have too much, though I dare say, as you say, he means well. And Mrs. Clinchworthy, how do you like her?"

"So much! I cannot tell you how much. She treats me more like a daughter than a dependent."

"And Frank?"

"Oh, he is a very fine young fellow and pleasant withal, but——"

"You mean he is a bit conceited. That is not surprising, seeing how they spoil him. All the same, he is a very good fellow at the bottom, and he and I are excellent friends."

Jack said nothing about Kate, and Polly would have given something to know whether the omission was accidental or intentional, and why. While they were talking he and she had been taking stock of each other, and comparing the present with the past. Her verdict was favorable; she thought Jack had greatly improved. In person he was taller and broader, his silky little mustache

suited him, his face was fuller and browner than of yore, and there was a careless ease in his manner which he had doubtless acquired by foreign travel and contact with a wider world than that of Ashcombe and Whitebrook. Her *protégé* had become a man, and Polly felt that she could almost marry him for his own sake and without insisting on a cash settlement. She would be content with a policy of insurance on his life-expectations.

Jack judged Polly less favorably than she judged him. Her three years servitude at Hampstead had attenuated her frame and robbed her complexion of its bloom, while the hollowness of her cheeks magnified the somewhat aggressive prominence of her nose. The plump girl had become a lean woman, and Jack, who did not admire lean women, thought she would have some difficulty in marrying a man of means who would lay his fortune at her feet.

If Polly could have read his thoughts she would have been very angry. Fortunately she could not, and by way of drawing him, inquired pointblank what he thought of Miss Clinchworthy.

Jack reflected an instant, as though the question had never occurred or been put to him before, then answered, with the careless ease which a moment before she had so much admired: "She is a very nice girl, I think; at least everybody says so. By Jove! she is there at the gate with her father."

Mr. Clinchworthy and his daughter were walking briskly toward the lawn, she with her face hidden by a sunshade, he carrying a Bible in one hand and a gold-headed ebony cane in the other.

"Glad to hear you have done so well on the Continent,

John," said he, when they had shaken hands. "Your father tells me you have made some good contracts."

"Yes, I have done pretty well: but no better than they have done at home. We have as many orders on the books as will keep the shop going for a year, though we don't get another."

"It is a great deal to be thankful for, John, and I hope you sometimes look at it in that light. We have also much to be thankful for, being well under order, though not for a year; and prices are fairly satisfactory, I am glad to say. You will stay and take tea with us, of course, and I shall be very pleased if you will go to evening service with us afterward."

"I would with pleasure if I had not promised my father to be at home in time for our own tea. I only got back on Friday, and we have a great many things to talk over and arrange."

"I am sorry to hear you say so, John. I think business ought to be entirely dismissed from our minds on the Sabbath, much more from our conversation."

"I think you must have had business in your mind just now, though, when you said you were well under order at satisfactory prices," retorted Jack rather unkindly.

Mr. Clinchworthy looked "gloppened," as they say in Lancashire.

"That—that was an inadvertence, John," he stammered; "we are all apt to stumble at times. I must be more watchful, and I am obliged to you for directing my attention to the—little lapse of which I was guilty."

Nevertheless he did not renew the invitation to tea, and to his wife afterward expressed the opinion that John

Armstrong was a forward young man, and very conceited.

Meanwhile Polly had been watching Jack and Kate, especially Kate, as keenly as a cat watches a mouse, though less obviously, noting, among other things, that as he and she shook hands her eyes brightened, and an unmistakable blush mantled her cheeks. When they parted Polly fancied their hands lingered a little; when Jack went away Kate's face darkened as the sky darkens when the sun hides his face behind a cloud, after which she walked listlessly toward the house, and stayed in her own room until the tea bell rang.

As for Jack, his face had been so deeply bronzed by Continental suns that it was impossible to tell whether he blushed or not.

"There is a mystery about this," thought Miss Perkins. "I believe Jack's indifference is put on. It is just a little overdone. But be that as it may, I am quite sure Kate is gone on him. Can he have jilted her? I shouldn't wonder; men are a bad lot."

CHAPTER XXV.

AFTER a while, and no very long while, Miss Perkins came reluctantly to the conclusion that there was no hope of bringing her old admirer back to his allegiance. Though always kind, he was never warm. He liked to talk about old times at Ashcombe, but if she tried to lead up to aught more intimate he would either cleverly evade the question or abruptly change the subject. Moreover, further observation strengthened her in the belief that words of love had passed between Miss Clinchworthy and Jack. Kate could neither dissemble her pleasure when he came nor hide her discouragement when he went away—from Polly; nobody else seemed to see it. Jack kept up his show of indifference, yet when he spoke to Kate there was a nameless something in his manner, a touch of tenderness in his voice, which were eminently suggestive, and Polly felt sure that Kate was incapable of giving her heart to a man who had not led her to believe she was beloved.

What did it mean? These two, as Polly could not deny, were in every way suited to each other. Fortune had been kind to them, their families were friendly, their means ample, and there seemed to be no just cause or impediment why, if they so desired, they should not be joined together in matrimony.

Polly's jealousy of Kate, never great, turned to pity, for she saw that the girl was unhappy, and her anger was kindled against Jack, as much because he had fallen

short of her expectations as that he had behaved ill to Miss Clinchworthy. For when it was a question between a man and a woman, Miss Perkins assumed that the fault lay with the man.

Time would solve the mystery. In the meantime she turned her attention to Frank Clinchworthy, for though she did not like him as well as she had liked Jack, he was good-looking, good-natured, and well off, and had in him the making of a good husband, meaning thereby a docile, obedient husband. But he, too, proved impervious to the delicate little attentions by which she sought to draw him on, did not appear conscious of them even, and becoming hopeless of success, Polly wisely renounced the enterprise before her intended victim had divined her purpose.

And then Miss Perkins was at the end of her resources. She knew no other young men except as speaking acquaintances. The Clinchworthys went little into society, nor was there much society at Whitebrook to go into. Now and then they gave a dinner party, sometimes an evening party, but since Miss Perkins' appearance on the scene they had given neither the one nor the other. Frank's friends came only to play billiards and smoke; and when she paid calls with Mrs. and Miss Clinchworthy they met only women.

Catching a rich husband—or any other—was not so easy as she had expected, and the poor girl began to lose heart.

"I shall have to remain a governess to the end of my days," was her despairing thought. "Yet I am capable of better things. I could manage a house, a business, or a man. I wish they had brought me up as a doctor,—there are such creatures, I believe,—anything but a gover-

ness. If I were independent, or had a factory like Mr. Clinchworthy or a machine shop like the Armstrongs, I would not give a fig for the best man that breathes; and if I had the requisite knowledge I should be as clever at business as Jack, and cleverer than Frank. Well, there are worse things than being a governess, after all! I should like to be rich; but even though I were I could not have much more than clothes, pocket money, a good home, and kind friends; and if my future were less precarious,—in two or three years Clara and May will have to go to school and I shall have to go away,—I should be content. Anyhow, I am not going to worry about men any more. It is like casting pearls before swine. They say everybody has a chance,—there is a tide in the affairs of women as well as of men,—and mine will come. Till then, patience."

One evening Mr. Clinchworthy came home in high feather, his face beaming as though he had heard good news or done an excellent stroke of business.

"Nathan Yates is coming to dine with us next Thursday, Susan," said he, as they sat down to tea. "We were on the bench together to-day, and I asked him, and he accepted my invitation. I am going to ask Brooks, Brown, Robinson, Crowther, and Pearson and their wives to meet him. Six of the wealthiest men in Whitebrook, Miss Perkins, worth among them at least a million and a half."

"And Nathan Yates is worth more than all the rest put together," remarked Frank.

"Yes, Nathan is the richest man in the town. Yet his father, who founded the brewery, began life as a potman, and did not leave Nathan more than thirty or forty thousand pounds. That's five-and-twenty years

since; Nathan was barely twenty-one at the time, and now his income is nearer fifty than forty thousand a year."

"All made out of beer," observed Polly. "If I made a fortune I should like to make it out of something more noble than beer."

"Well, it would be desirable. But you must remember that if Mr. Yates did not brew beer somebody else would. After all, it is only supplying a want, and that is what we all do and live by, yourself included, Miss Perkins; and I am told that Nathan's beer is very good and less deleterious to the constitution than that of many of his competitors."

"Which is so much to the good," said Frank. "And now father has told you his news I must tell you mine. Mark Armstrong and Mlle. Hermance are engaged to be married."

"That shows what perseverance will do; he has been hankering after her for a long time, though it has been kept very quiet, and he has been very sly," said Mrs. Clinchworthy. "I am very glad for both their sakes. Mademoiselle is a charming girl, and Mark a worthy young man."

"Who told you?" asked Kate.

"Jack; I met him on my way home."

"Are they going to be married soon?"

"That is more than I can tell you, but I don't see why not. Mark can keep a wife. The profits of the concern are increasing, and his percentages make a nice penny, to say nothing of his salary."

Though Mark was at length within sight of the haven of connubial bliss, his voyage thither had been long and tedious. After his semi-declaration at Mrs. Clinch-

worthy's party, he thought it would be smooth sailing, and that he had naught to do, as Jack put it, but go in and win. In this he was mistaken. Lucie gave him no chance. If she saw him in the street she passed over on the other side. If she paid a visit to Pye Nest she was always fetched home by a couple of maids, and in one way or another she baulked all his attempts to get speech of her, save in the presence of witnesses. Mark's love-making was limited to squeezing the young lady's hand,—whenever he had an opportunity,—but she never by any chance returned the pressure or met his eye.

It was very disheartening, and in his extremity Mark took counsel with Jack.

"I think I'll write to her," said he.

"I don't much believe in proposing by letter," returned Jack reflectively. "It isn't half as exciting as doing it by word of mouth, for one thing,—at least I should think not,—and then there is the suspense. You don't know when you will get an answer. However, there seems nothing else for it. Yes, I would write."

Which Mark did, a manly, straightforward letter; no gush or gammon, yet pathetic and touching withal.

"Just the thing! If that does not fetch her nothing will," said Jack, to whom the letter was submitted for his opinion.

It did not even fetch a reply. Lucie made no sign, and kept "herself to herself" as much as ever.

After waiting a reasonable, or, rather, an unreasonable time for an answer, Mark again consulted his trusty counselor.

"I am at my wit's end. What would you do now?" he asked despairingly.

"Well, if I were in your place," returned Jack, "I

think I should take the bull by the horns. Demand Miss Bland's permission to pay your addresses to Miss Hermance, and if she has not the necessary authority, ask her to put your request forward in the right quarter."

"It would require nice management, that would," quoth Mark dubiously. "Couldn't you do it for me, Johnny? You would manage it a good deal better than I should."

"Nay, hang it! I wouldn't do my courting by deputy if I were you."

"God bless me! You surely don't suppose I'm going to court Miss Bland."

"No, but if you talk nicely, and butter her up, you may get a chance of courting somebody else."

"There's something i' that. Well, I'll try it on, though as like as not she'll order me out. They say she was crossed in love when she was young, and is a regular old cat in owt as concerns courting."

"Never mind what they say. It may not be half true, and the devil is not as black as he is painted, let alone Miss Bland. Pluck up a spirit and go."

On this advice Mark acted, though with many misgivings, and on his way to the seminary conned a little speech in which he intended to disclose the purpose of his visit. After handing his card to the servant who opened the door, he was shown into the room where he had first met Lucie, and asked her to translate the letter which nobody at the shop could read. A good many things had happened since then.

Presently entered to him Miss Bland, her wrinkled face all smiles, for the Armstrongs were now people of "means and position," and she had heard good accounts of the eldest son.

"I am delighted to see you, Mr. Mark," said she, taking a seat near him, "the more so as it is rarely that gentlemen honor me with a visit so early in the day. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

Mark plunged in *medias res.*

"Well, it is just this here, Miss Bland: I admire Mlle. Hermance, and ask you kindly to let me pay my addresses to her."

It was not the speech he intended to make, but it served.

Miss Bland regarded him with unaffected surprise.

"You do astonish me, Mr. Mark, and I really don't know, you know, how I should respond to so startling a request," she said, or rather stammered. "It is the first time in my experience such a thing has happened, and with every desire to oblige you, I doubt whether it would be compatible with the high character of this establishment for a gentleman to come here on—I mean with —amatory intentions. But I am forgetting the main point. Does Lucie know of this?"

"No. I cannot get a word with her, do what I will."

"I am glad to hear it. Lucie is very circumspect, and her conduct a credit to the seminary."

"But couldn't you let me have a minute or two with her? She knows I admire her, for I told her as much in a letter, but as she did not answer it, I am where I was."

"Did not answer your letter! What an admirable girl. She is quite a pattern of propriety. I wish all my governesses were like her. Now, as to your request, Mr. Mark: I have no objection to you personally, and should be very sorry to stand in the way of your happiness, but Lucie, though in my charge, is not my child, and I should be exceeding my authority if I allowed you

to come here in the character of a pretendant to her hand. In her own country, when it is a question of two young people becoming engaged, the matter is arranged beforehand by their respective mammas, and if they are so unfortunate as to have none, by their respective grandmammas. Moreover, pending their marriage the young people are not permitted to see each other, except in the presence of a third party, generally the *fiancée's* papa or mamma. It is a system of which I warmly approve, for marriage is a serious matter, and ought not to be lightly entered upon. So serious, indeed, that I have always shrunk from undertaking its responsibilities, though I have had many opportunities, Mr. Mark, many opportunities."

"It is quite enough to look at you to be sure of that," responded Mark gallantly, though perhaps not very veraciously. "I am quite ready to accept the responsibility of marrying Lucie if she will have me, but my mother cannot very well see Mme. Hermance, and they would not understand one another if she did."

"That's quite true, and the proper thing would be for your mamma to write to Mme. Hermance, but as she might have some difficulty in expressing herself in French I shall be pleased to write on her behalf and yours."

"Thank you kindly, Miss Bland. I cannot expect you to do more than that, if so much. But hadn't we better ask Lucie whether she is willing—for you to write to her mother?"

"By all means, that is a necessary preliminary. I will send for her," ringing the bell.

"Tell Mademoiselle that I should be pleased to see her for a few minutes," said she to the servant who answered the call.

Mark utilized the time of waiting by giving Miss Bland a brief statement of his means and prospects, which the schoolmistress regarded as highly satisfactory, and said to herself that it would be a fine match for Lucie, and, indirectly, a fine advertisement for the seminary, especially if they were married from it, though the wedding breakfast would be a considerable expense.

When Lucie, on entering the drawing room, perceived Mark she seemed taken aback, and half-disposed to retreat.

"You need not be afraid, dear. I don't think Mr. Mark will hurt you," said Miss Bland, with an encouraging smile. "Come and sit down. I want to talk to you."

Lucie had no sooner complied with this request than, with an agility for which nobody would have given her credit, Miss Bland rose from her chair and glided from the room.

Lucie would have followed, but Mark, putting his back against the door, barred the way.

"Oh, let me go!" she cried plaintively.

"Not till you have put me out of my misery," said her admirer resolutely, albeit kindly. "You know what I have come for—an answer to my letter."

"Please do let me go. What would they say at home?"

"Never mind what they would say. We are in England, and it is an English custom for a man to plead his own cause with the girl he loves. Miss Bland has kindly consented to write to your mother—if you are willing. Are you?"

"Oh, Mr. Mark!"

"Are you? It is no use trying to get out. I shall

not budge till I know my fate. I have served for you nearly as long as Jacob served for Rachel, and I'll take no denial."

With downcast eyes, and blushing, if possible, more deeply than before, Lucie murmured, "Would you like Miss Bland to write to my mother, Mr. Mark?"

"More than anything in the world, if you are willing, dear. Are you?" taking her hand.

Lucie nodded affirmatively and Mark kissed the hand he had held in his. Remembering the extreme propriety of Swiss customs he feared to venture more, though had not a peculiar "Hem!" been just then heard at the door he might have done.

"Miss Bland!" exclaimed Lucie, snatching away her hand, and sinking into the nearest chair.

"Well?" asked the schoolmistress, for she it was, looking from one to the other.

"It is all right, Miss Bland. Lucie is willing."

"Good! I congratulate you both. I will write to Mme. Hermance to-morrow, and I think you may count on her consent."

After again thanking Miss Bland, Mark took his leave.

This time Lucie returned the pressure of his hand, and he went away rejoicing in his victory, and feeling inches taller than he had ever felt before.

CHAPTER XXVI.

During the week that intervened between its announcement and its consummation, the forthcoming dinner party was the chief topic of conversation in Mr. Clinchworthy's family. Mr. Clinchworthy himself was very full of it, and gave Miss Perkins brief biographies of the expected guests, all of whom where his "brother beaks," as Matthew Armstrong irreverently expressed it. Two were deputy lieutenants, a dignity which Jimmy coveted and hoped ere long to obtain, and not one was worth less than a hundred and twenty thousand.

But as touching wealth, Mr. Yates was an easy first, his closest competitor "nowhere." Polly sat opposite to him at dinner and observed him and the others with great interest. She had never been in the company of so many rich men, hardly, indeed, of any rich man, before. Mr. Yates, as the gem of the collection, naturally took most of her attention. Though no beauty, he was not ill-favored, and his healthy color, spare figure, and erect carriage made him look younger than his actual years.

Polly had often, in imagination, inherited a fortune, and thought what she would do with it—how it would affect her life and modify her ideas; and now she mentally contrasted her income of twenty shillings a week with the brewer's thousand pounds, and wondered what her feelings would be, and his, if by some freak of destiny their positions were suddenly reversed.

It did not seem fair that there should be so great a difference between one person and another, and neither the countenances nor the conversation of these six rich men revealed exceptional ability; one indeed looked exceptionally stupid, and there was no obvious reason why any of them should be better off than herself.

On the other hand, Polly was not a Communist; she had no ill-natured desire, born of envy, to reduce the rich folk to her own level—she wanted to rise to theirs, and would probably have been contented with half the wealth of the least opulent of Mr. Clinchworthy's guests.

The talk was mostly gossip and "shop," and to Polly not entertaining; but presently Mr. Robinson introduced a more suggestive topic—the balance of trade, thereby enabling her to take part in the conversation, as she had been well instructed in the economy of manufactures by Mr. Noble, with whom, as with herself, it was a pet subject. Mr. Robinson was an advocate of the mercantile theory, which, though often slain, never dies. Polly and Nathan Yates joined issue with him, and there ensued a lively discussion in which the governess distinctly scored. Robinson was put to rout, and the brewer complimented Polly on her proficiency in the dreary science.

When the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing room Miss Clinchworthy and Miss Perkins were asked to oblige with some music. Whereupon they played a duet, after which Kate sang a Scotch song to Polly's accompaniment. It was then Polly's turn, and in the course of the evening she sang a French chanson, a German lied, and an Italian cantata. Nature had vouchsafed her neither great musical ability nor a brilliant voice, but such talent as she possessed had been

assiduously cultivated, and her audience, which was essentially uncritical, thought her wonderfully clever.

"You seem to know a good many languages, Miss Perkins," observed Nathan Yates, after complimenting her on her singing.

"Not many. Only three besides my own," quoth she diffidently. "I learned French, German, and Latin because I might have to teach them. Of Italian I learned only enough to be able to understand musical terms, which, as you know, are all in that language, and to sing a song or two."

"And did you learn music for the same reason?"

"Because I should have it to teach? Certainly. But for that I doubt whether I should have learned it at all. At any rate, not so thoroughly."

"And other things?"

"I did my best to acquire whatever was likely to be useful to me as a teacher."

"You made yourself mistress of your business, in fact. You were wise; that is the way to get on."

This was said with an air of condescension which Polly resented, and she replied rather warmly:

"Get on! How can a woman get on? The best I can hope for in the way of advancement is a place as finishing governess and seventy or eighty pounds a year."

"Well, seventy or eighty pounds a year with board and lodging isn't bad pay, Miss Perkins."

"Not bad pay! How would you like to have only seventy or eighty pounds a year, Mr. Yates?"

The brewer stared,—he was not used to being "taken up so short,"—then laughed a little and said he did not think he should like it, adding: "But circumstances alters

cases. If I was a clever young lady with no responsibilities——"

"Clever!" interrupted Polly. "You call me clever because I know a few languages and that. You are clever, if you like. You make a fresh fortune every year, while with my utmost efforts I could not make a competence in a lifetime."

Nathan laughed again, the compliment pleased him.

"Nay, don't call me clever," he said deprecatingly. "It's only a bit of coal-rake sense."

"Coal-rake sense?"

"That means sense enough to rake money together and stick to it. Many make money, but few keep it; they either muddle it away or invest it badly. Invest your money safely, and at a good rate of interest, that's the main point."

"It seems to me that the main point is to have money to invest."

Mr. Yates' reply was lost in the opening notes of a song with which Mrs. Crowther, after much persuasion, had consented to favor the company, and the colloquy ceased.

A few days after the dinner party Mr. Yates called at Brookfield House to pay his respects. The other guests sent their wives and their cards.

Nathan was very chatty, and talked much about his house. He had only just got shut of the decorators and upholsterers.

"Dear me! They must have been very slow. Why, the house has been built for years!" said Mrs. Clinchworthy.

"Ay, built, but not finished inside, and so long as there was room for my accommodation I was in no hurry.

Besides, I had laid out my plans not to spend more than so much a year on it, and nowt out o' capital, all out of income. But now, as every room is finished and furnished, I should like you to come and look at it; and bring th' young ladies with you."

Mrs. Clinchworthy said she should be delighted, the young ladies said they should be delighted, and Nathan fixed the following Thursday afternoon for the visit.

"It is a great honor," she observed to her daughter and Polly, when Nathan was gone. "He gives a men's dinner party now and then—but so far as I know no lady has ever been inside Heatherley Hall."

"Has he no lady relatives?" asked Polly.

"I believe there is an aunt and a cousin or two, Garstang way; but they are not ladies, and I have heard that Mr. Yates makes them an allowance on condition that they never come near him."

When the day and the hour came the party were driven to Heatherley Hall and there received by the owner, who showed them round the house and grounds. It was a noble mansion, furnished and decorated in good taste, Nathan having put himself in the hands of experts with almost *carte blanche* as to price. But though grand, it was dreary. It lacked life. In the house there were only a few servants, in the gardens only gardeners, and in the stables, with their twelve loose boxes and stalls, only a pair of horses.

Nevertheless the Clinchworthys were all admiration, but Miss Perkins, who did not see why a rich man's house should be exempt from criticism, was more candid. Nathan asked her what she thought of his pictures.

"Good on the whole," said she, "but some are mere

daubs, and all are badly hung. The contrasts are too violent."

"I dare say. I left th' hanging to th' butler, and he does not know much more about pictures than I do. I expect them as you call daubs are what I bought at a sale on my own judgment. I got t' others from Agnew—gave him an order for two thousand pounds' worth of paintings and five hundred pounds' worth of engravings, suitable for a gentleman's house. Do you understand about painting, Miss Perkins?"

"She should, seeing that her father was an artist," answered Mrs. Clinchworthy, "and she paints herself, very well too; so does Kate."

"I wonder whether they'd do me the favor [pronounced "favver"] to come some afternoon and see th' pictures hung afresh, as they should be. They'd have nowt to do but give orders."

Miss Clinchworthy and Miss Perkins said they should be very glad, and the details were arranged on the spot.

The library was a room of fine proportions, with a sorry array of empty shelves.

"I haven't getten any books yet, but there is some coming. I've given Robjoy [a local bookseller] an order for two hundred pounds' worth of standard works, bound i' morocco, all to be of th' same size."

"And left the selection to him?" asked Polly, with an amused smile.

"Ay, he knows more about books than I do. New books comes expensive. When there's a good sale on somewhere I'll get Robjoy, or somebody as knows about books, to buy me a thousand or two,—unless I buy a whole library for a lump sum,—and that would happen be

th' best. Them empty shelves doesn't look well, and I mean to have 'em filled up."

"What a splendid room for a dance!" exclaimed Kate, as they surveyed the dining room. "Why don't you give a dance, Mr. Yates?"

"Me give a dance! How could I? I'm a bachelor, and ladies wouldn't come."

"That is easily managed. You only need a hostess, and I am sure Mrs. Clinchworthy would be glad to act in that capacity," put in Polly.

"I should be delighted, and regard it as a great honor," responded Mrs. Clinchworthy.

"Do say yes, Mr. Yates; I do so love a dance," pleaded Kate.

"And you, Miss Perkins, do you like dancing?" demanded Nathan, turning to the governess.

"Immensely, and I second Miss Clinchworthy's request with all my heart. The idea is excellent. You will give great pleasure to your friends and afford all the ladies of your acquaintance an opportunity of seeing the inside of Heatherley Hall."

"Well, there's summat i' that," observed Nathan reflectively. "Come now, I'll tell you what. I am a busy man and know nowt about these things, but if you will undertake th' job, send out th' invitations and make all the arrangements, it shall be done. I'll give you a free hand, stipulating only that the thing is well done. What say you?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" exclaimed the ladies.

"And yes again," added Kate. "Thank you so much, Mr. Yates."

"All right! Set to work as soon as you like. But I think we had better reserve th' dining room for th'

supper. I'll have a ballroom run up on the lawn opposite th' south front. There are folk in Manchester as does that sort of thing. And now about th' time? It is rather too warm for dancing just now, isn't it?"

This was true, and after some further discussion the time was fixed for the third week in September.

The ladies went home in high spirits. Nathan had given them a job they liked, and conferred on them an honor which Mrs. and Miss Clinchworthy highly appreciated. Polly, on her part, failed to see where the honor came in, perhaps because she did not hold Mr. Yates to be a great man simply because he happened to have a great fortune.

Albeit the ladies had fully six weeks before them they began laying out their plans forthwith, and until the great event came off it was an absorbing subject of conversation at Brookfield House, and the big brewer's big ball, and the connection therewith of the Clinchworthys, gave rise to considerable wonderment and talk in the town.

Meanwhile the Clinchworthys saw more of the gentleman in question than ever they had seen before, for though he had given the ladies a free hand it was necessary to have occasional consultations, and more than once Nathan called at Brookfield House when there was nothing particular to consult about, as Mr. Clinchworthy thought—and he found great comfort therein—to have a chat with him.

One afternoon in the beginning of September, as Polly and her pupils were returning from a long walk in the country, they were overtaken by Yates, who was driving his four-wheeled dog-cart.

"Can I give you a lift?" said he, reining in his horses, and raising his hat

"Thank you, the girls are rather tired," quoth Polly, "if you will kindly take them?"

"With pleasure—you also."

"But you haven't room."

"Of course I have. Sagar,"—to the groom,—"you must go on Shanks' pony to the brewery. Now, you get up in front, Miss Perkins; the young ladies behind."

"Well, how are things going?" asked Nathan, when they were under way.

"Very well, I think. We sent you a list of the invitations last night."

"Yes, I got it this morning. I see you have asked the Armstrongs."

"Have you any objection to them?"

"Well, old Matt and me hasn't been the best of friends for some years. He kaled me at a sale, and made me pay through the nose for some land as I couldn't well do without, and I haven't quite forgiven him. However, as th' invitations has gone out there's no help for it, I suppose?"

"I don't think any of them but Jack and Nancy will come."

"Oh, I don't object to them! Two's neither here nor there, and so long as they don't all come, and I have not to shake hands with old Matt, it'll be all right."

"And won't this be an admirable opportunity for reconciliation, and the burial of old grudges, Mr. Yates?" asked Polly sweetly.

"Well, happen," replied Nathan rather doubtfully. "However, I'll let it be so, if you like."

"I should like, Mr. Yates."

"All right! It's settled then. I suppose you are quite

comfortable with the Clinchworthys?" lowering his voice.

"Quite; they are very kind to me," said Polly, surprised as much by the abrupt change of subject as the irrelevancy of the question. It was followed by another, equally inconsequential.

"You have neither father nor mother, I understand?"

"No, they died when I was twelve years old, when my uncle, the headmaster of Ashcombe Grammar School, took charge of me and brought me up."

"And then turned you out to earn your own living."

"No, sir, he did not turn me out, and never would have done," exclaimed Polly indignantly. "But he has a family of his own, and I chose to turn out and get my own living, rather than be a burden on him."

Nathan made no answer, and no more was said until they reached Brookfield House.

"Will you be at home to-morrow afternoon?" he asked, as she was preparing to alight.

"I think so. Why?" said Polly.

"I want a word with you in private. I'll call about four. Take care how you get out. That step is a bit awkward. Now you are all right. My respects to Mrs. Clinchworthy. Good-day!"

It was done so quickly that before Polly could ask whether the proposed "word in private" had reference to the ball, or to what else, Nathan was off, and she had to draw her own conclusions.

CHAPTER XXVII.

POLLY concluded that Mr. Yates meant to propose. There had been a significance in his voice as he asked for a "word in private," a nameless something in his manner, which left little room for doubt. Yet she had neither expected a proposal nor endeavored to please him, often, indeed, treated him so cavalierly as to provoke Mrs. Clinchworthy into hinting that Miss Perkins did not always show him the respect which was due to a gentleman of Nathan's means and position.

It was an unanticipated and undesired crowning of her hopes. Unanticipated, because it had never occurred to her that a man who might have a lord's daughter for the asking would condescend to a governess. Undesired, because though she had resolved to marry money if she might, she did not take kindly to the idea of marrying a man twice her age, destitute alike of culture or manners. In her matrimonial castle-building Polly had always bargained for a husband who should not only be rich, but young, well-educated, and, if possible, good-looking.

"Fancy living all one's life with a man who has no sense either for literature or art, who pronounces favor 'favver,' says 'them there,' and misuses the aspirate!"

These were Polly's first impressions. Before long, however, Polly thought differently. The idea became less repugnant. After all, forty-six was not so very old. It would not be a case of May and December, rather of

June and September, and Nathan had redeeming virtues. He was tall, well set up, and healthy; and blond men did not turn gray as soon as dark men. Also, he was honest and straightforward; able, too, else had he not succeeded so well in business, and worth more than half a million, while "aitchlessness" and roughness of speech were common Lancashire characteristics.

Moreover, in proposing to her—she took the proposal for granted—when he might mate with a lady of high degree, Mr. Yates was paying her a compliment which demanded her gratitude, even though it might not win her heart.

There was the rub. Mercenary though Polly was, she had a conscience. A loveless marriage was an eventuality on which she had not reckoned and from which she instinctively recoiled.

In this vacillating mood Miss Perkins remained, letting "I dare not" wait on "I would," until a happy thought put an end to her hesitation, though it did not quite hypnotize her conscience. French marriages were pure matters of business, arranged without reference to the likes or dislikes of the contracting parties, yet French marriages, as she had heard, generally turned out well. Why, then, should not a marriage between herself and Mr. Yates turn out well, the more especially as there was esteem, if not love, at least on one side, since he must have chosen her solely for her personal and moral qualities, a conclusion which put Polly on very good terms with herself.

This decided the matter. She should accept Nathan, yet in such a fashion as would show him that she was conferring rather than accepting a favor. He called punctually at the time appointed and was received by

Polly in the schoolroom, where they were more likely to be free from interruption than elsewhere. Mr. Yates had evidently got himself up for the occasion; his attire was smarter than usual, his coat adorned with a "button-hole." He had had his hair cut and his whiskers trimmed and touched up with brilliantine. Miss Perkins was pleased to see that he was nervous, the more especially as she was perfectly cool and collected. When a wooer is in earnest and the lady indifferent it gives her a great advantage, and Polly began to think that Nathan really loved her.

"It is a very fine day," said he, trifling nervously with one of his gloves.

"Very," assented Polly.

"It has been very fine weather lately."

Again Polly assented.

"I wonder whether it will last?"

"Your glove won't last long if you keep pulling it about in that way."

This rather knocked Nathan out of time, but pulling himself together and conquering his nervousness he said he had "happen better come to th' point at once."

"You have very likely guessed my object," he continued. "I have come here to try and persuade you to take me for better or worse. I took a liking for you th' first time I saw you, at Clinchworthy's dinner party. I thought you were th' cleverest young woman I had ever met, qualified to make a man happy and grace any station in life. What I have seen of you has deepened th' first impression; th' liking has grown to love, and if you will have me I'll do my best to make you happy. I know there's a deal of difference in our ages, but if it's true that a man's no older than he feels, I am young yet.

I have never been ill i' my life. I am as steady as a growing tree, and a better man than many a one not half my age. As for means, you know I'm middling well off, and you will find me liberal in money matters. Now I have told my tale, what do you say—yes or no?"

Polly was pleased with Nathan's little speech, more than pleased, touched—almost to the point of saying "No." His very bluntness savored of sincerity, and it pained her to think that the alternative of refusal was accepting his hand without reciprocating his love. But she would be as honest as she could without absolutely rejecting him.

"You ask me to say 'yes' or 'no,'" she said, after a spell of thought. "Well, I would rather say neither just now, but if you press me for an answer it must be 'No.' Until yesterday I had not the remotest idea that you—cared for me, and though I have a great respect for you I cannot say that I love you. To say 'Yes' would imply that I did."

"I like you all the better for your honesty," exclaimed Nathan earnestly. "It stands to reason that you cannot feel for me as I feel for you, right off at th' stick end. But that need not stand in th' way; if you have a respect for me th' love will come, and I'm quite willing to risk it."

"But you must give me a little time, Mr. Yates; it is all so sudden that really, you know——"

"How much time do you want?"

"Give me a fortnight. You shall have your answer on the night of the ball."

"Well, a fortnight isn't so long, and we shall be seeing each other pretty often—about the ball. It's a bargain."

And Nathan approached his lady love as though he

would like to seal the bargain in the way usual with sweethearts; but she gently repulsed him, and he did not insist.

"A fortnight isn't so long," he repeated to himself.

Then they parted, he well satisfied, for Polly had virtually accepted him; she with a quieted conscience, and taking great credit to herself for saying frankly that she did not love him, conveniently oblivious of the fact that she meant in her heart to marry him.

But nothing is more common or more easy than self-deception, and, as it happened, Polly was deceiving herself quite as much as she was deceiving Nathan. There was also mutual deception, his partiality for her being much more the result of calculation than of passion. When he began to build his big house he meant to marry so soon as it was finished, and he lighted on the sort of woman he desired. It took him longer to find the woman than to build the house. His ideal was one without relatives, or as nearly so as might be—he had plenty of his own "Garstang way," more than Mrs. Clinchworthy knew of, and they gave him no end of trouble. He wanted no "in-laws." They would be sure to be wanting something from him. This requirement could not be met in Whitebrook. There were no suitable young women without kin, and youth was a condition *sine qua non*. Moreover, he was terribly afraid of being accepted merely for his money—or "taken in," as he put it to himself.

At their first meeting he was attracted by Polly's looks, which had vastly improved since her arrival at Whitebrook, and surprised by the extent of her knowledge and the variety of her accomplishments. He liked her spirit, too, and admired the way in which she stood up to

Robinson. Here was a young woman with a mind of her own, who made no attempt to shape her opinions to his, and treated Mr. Yates as though he were no better off than anybody else, neither trying to attract his attention nor win his favor. She at least did not want to marry him for his money, and when he learned from Mrs. Clinchworthy that Miss Perkins had no other relatives than an uncle and a few cousins who lived in Surrey, and from herself that she knew the value of money, he said to himself: "This is the lass for me."

Her candid avowal that she did not love him, and her refusal to say "Yes" at the first asking, were other good signs. It showed that she was honest and truthful. Most young women in her condition, with no better prospect than seventy pounds a year, "hardly earned," would have jumped at the offer as greedily as a fish jumps at a fly.

In fact, if Polly had possessed a profound knowledge of human nature in general and Nathan Yates' nature in particular, and deliberately laid siege to him, she could not have served her purpose more effectually than by the tactics which she had accidentally adopted.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

POLLY'S motives for making Mr. Yates wait a fortnight for a definite answer to his proposal were rather complex, as motives generally are. One was a natural reluctance to surrender at the first summons, another to accustom herself to the idea and try, honestly try, to like Nathan, just a little, before taking the final plunge. Yet another had reference to Jack Armstrong, for whom, had the opportunity presented itself, she would have thrown over the brewer without hesitation. Nevertheless she bore no malice, and set great store by Jack's friendship, which she greatly desired to retain, the more so as though her engagement with Mr. Yates would vastly enlarge the circle of her acquaintances, it was more likely to make for her secret enemies than steadfast friends. And she had so few steadfast friends. Only three—Jack, her uncle, and Mr. Noble, and the last had very peculiar ideas about marriage. She had once heard him say that a woman who married for money or position was even more culpable than one who deliberately sold herself, inasmuch as she doubled venality with perjury. This was, of course, absurd, and Polly had persuaded herself that she was not going to marry Mr. Yates solely for his money; she meant to like him, and be a devoted wife. Nevertheless, she did not feel as though she should like to see Mr. Noble at her wedding, or meet him during the honeymoon.

His defection would reduce the number of her old

friends to two, and she was by no means sure about Jack. Recalling their conversation on the eve of his departure from Ashcombe, he might think that she had deliberately entrapped Nathan Yates, and give her the cold shoulder—unless, in the meantime, she could carry out a plan which she had conceived for securing his gratitude and good will by rendering him an important service.

To give Polly her due it was not solely for selfish reasons that she proposed to do this. Jack and she were old friends. He had done her a good turn, and one good turn deserves another. Moreover, in serving him she would be serving Kate Clinchworthy, whom she liked, and was anxious to make her friend.

As has already been mentioned, Polly suspected that there had been love passages between these two; why they had not resulted in an engagement she could not divine. This suspicion had deepened into certainty albeit, as touching the cause of the estrangement, she was nearly as much in the dark as ever. At the outset she had blamed Jack, on the assumption that when sweethearts fall out the lover is more likely to be in fault than the lass. But one day when Jack was at Brookfield, and Kate and he happened to be left to themselves for a few minutes, Polly came on them unawares, and accidentally overheard him say:

"Are you still obdurate, Kate?" and Kate answered:

"I cannot break my promise, Jack, even for you."

From which Polly inferred that there was obduracy, perhaps obstinacy, on both sides, it being hard to believe that Kate had made a promise which should prevent her from marrying Jack, or that he had demanded something from her which she ought not to concede.

On the other hand, Kate was singularly conscientious, and, though amiable and sweet-tempered, possessed of a tenacious will. She regarded a promise as sacred, and to be faithfully observed at whatever sacrifice—in matters of small as well as of great moment. Nevertheless, Polly was sanguine enough to believe that if she could obtain positive information as to the nature of the promise in question she might be able to remove the obstacle—which could not be very serious—and reconcile the lovers.

This was the service which she proposed to render them. The difficulty was to obtain positive information. It could be got only from Kate or Jack, more easily from him than from her; but as Polly saw Jack only now and then, and there was no time to be lost, she decided to try what she could do with Kate.

An opportunity was not long to seek. Mrs. Clinchworthy was away from home. Clara and May were amusing themselves in the garden, and the two young women were reading in a leafy arbor open to the west and warmed by the waning sun. But Kate did not appear to be very intent on her book. Every now and then she laid it on her lap and looked vaguely over the smoky chimneys toward a wild and treeless moorland, which stretched away until it met the sky. Once she audibly sighed.

"What is the matter, dear? Are you not well?" asked Polly.

"Quite well, thank you. Why do you ask?"

"Because you don't seem happy."

"Don't judge by appearances. They are deceptive."

"Not always. I have thought for some time that you were not happy. Are you?"

Kate did not answer. She was too veracious to deny the truth, too shy, or, perhaps, too distrustful, to make an admission which might provoke further questions.

"Don't think I am asking out of curiosity. It makes me unhappy to see you unhappy, and, when one has something on one's mind, it is always a relief to confide it to a friend. Perhaps I might help you, and you may rely absolutely on my discretion."

Still Kate made no answer, but Polly could see by her face that she had not taken offense.

"What if I know—in part at least—what is troubling you?"

"Impossible! How can you know?" demanded Kate sharply. "Has anybody——"

"Nobody has told me, but I can make observations and draw inferences, and unless I am greatly mistaken there is either a misunderstanding or a difference, perhaps both, between you and Jack Armstrong; and it seems such a pity and makes me very sorry. You are so well suited to each other, and Jack and I are old friends; and you and I, though not old friends, are good friends; and it would be such a pleasure if I could help you to conjure away this trouble. It cannot be serious."

"You are very kind, dear," said Kate mournfully; "but the trouble is serious, and I don't think you or anybody else can conjure it away. However, as you have guessed so much, I may as well tell you all; then you can judge for yourself—only nothing of this to anybody else."

"I give you my word that whatever passes between us here shall go no further," rejoined Polly earnestly.

Whereupon Kate made a clean breast of it.

Mrs. Bourne, the mistress of the school where she had completed her education, was an able, strong-minded,

devout woman, who exercised great influence over her pupils, yet in her religious views narrow almost to bigotry, an Independent of the old stock, and before Kate—who was one of her favorites—went away, she obtained from her a promise to marry none but a member of her own sect.

When Jack "spoke to her" she told him plainly that though she loved him she could not become his wife unless he became an Independent, and the reason why. But with this condition he was unable to comply. He would gladly go to chapel with her as often as she liked, but to change his religion, even for her, was simply out of the question, and albeit Jack had several times since tried to shake her resolution, Kate's conscience would not allow her to break the promise she had made to Mrs. Bourne.

"Mrs. Bourne had no right to exact such a promise," said Polly indignantly, "and I do not think you are in duty bound to keep it. I know I would not let a scruple of the sort separate me from the man I loved."

"We all have our own ideas of duty, mine is what I told you," rejoined Kate dryly. "I am unhappy now, but I should be still more unhappy if I broke my promise, although I see now that Mrs. Bourne did wrong to demand it, and I was foolish to give it. I see no way whatever out of the difficulty. I have abandoned hope"—this with a half sob.

Polly saw none either—for the moment, but presently she had an idea.

"Mrs. Bourne must release you from your promise," said she.

"I don't think Mrs. Bourne would if she could, and being dead she cannot," replied Kate.

"No way out there, then. Tell me exactly what you promised."

"Not to marry anyone who was not a member of our communion."

"Were those the precise words?"

"That is the precise meaning. What she said was: 'Promise me, Kate, never to marry any man who is not a church member,' and I gave my promise, never thinking that it would rise up in judgment against me in this way."

"You are sure those were her words."

"Quite. I remember them only too well."

Polly laughed.

"What are you laughing at?" demanded Kate, with asperity.

"At you and Jack, for a pair of simpletons. He is a church member. We were both confirmed on the same day at Ashcombe. What would you have more?"

Kate's face brightened with a new-born hope. This looked like a way out.

"I never thought of that before," said she. "You need not call Jack a simpleton, though, whatever I may be; all I told him was that I had promised to marry none but a member of our church, and that was certainly what Mrs. Bourne meant."

"Never mind what she meant, the point is what she said, and if you marry a church member you will have kept your word."

"With every disposition to do so, I cannot quite see it in that light," quoth Kate dubiously. "We both understood the words in the same sense, and I am afraid my conscience won't permit me."

"Bother your conscience!" interrupted Polly. "Can-

not you give yourself—and Jack—the benefit of the doubt? However, as you are so absurdly scrupulous, why not put the case to Mr. Atkinson? He is a fair man and your spiritual guide. Let him decide."

"But I should have to tell him."

"Naturally. But what of that? All ministers are more or less father confessors. At any rate, they receive confidences, and decide cases of conscience. If you like I will see him for you, and report faithfully what he says."

"Thank you so much, dear. Please do. When will you go?"

"At once. Nothing like the present. I will go now."

And Polly left the arbor, confident of success, for Mr. Atkinson was a good-natured, easy-going man, and she had a good case and a persuasive tongue. As she went Kate called after her: "Be back as soon as you can. Take a cab, I shall be in my own room."

Polly came back in a little over an hour, smiling.

"It's all right," she said. "Mr. Atkinson is quite of my opinion. He applauds your resolution to keep your promise, but thinks that if you keep it in the literal sense of the words in which it was given you will fully satisfy the requirements of duty. 'A church member' means a member of a Christian church, and he was good enough to say that he considers our Church comes under that category, for which I am very much obliged to him. Now are you satisfied?"

Kate threw her arms round Polly's neck, murmuring as she kissed her, "You have made me so happy, dear."

"That is what I meant to do. The next thing is to make Jack happy. Shall I arrange that for you?"

"You are very kind. But how will you manage?"

"We can take a walk in the Park to-morrow afternoon —you and I and the children, cannot we?"

"Certainly."

Polly sat down and scribbled a note which, when it was finished, she showed to Kate. Thus it ran:

"DEAR JACK:

"I shall be in the park to-morrow afternoon with somebody you know. If you happen to be there about four o'clock you may hear something to your advantage.

"Your old friend, "P. P."

The note, after being approved by Kate, was dispatched and duly received by Jack, who took good care to be in the park at the appointed hour, though he did not expect to meet a party of four. But after the customary greetings and the interchange of a few commonplaces Polly and her pupils wandered off into a by-path, and saw naught of the lovers for nearly an hour.

When they met again Jack took her aside.

"I am greatly obliged to you—more obliged than I can say," said he. "You have rendered me a service for which I shall always be your debtor."

"I meant to do," said she. "One good turn deserves another. You got me the place."

"That was a trifle. You have done more for me than I ever did for you, though if I had been half as sharp as you are I might have done it for myself, and I hold a large balance of gratitude at your disposal."

"I am glad to hear you say so, and I may draw on it sooner than you think for."

"The sooner the better. You will find me quite ready—but how, in what way?"

"To stand my friend, and speak a good word for me. That is all that I can say at present, so please don't ask any more questions. Shall we meet again to-night?"

"Yes; I have a communication to make to Mr. and Mrs. Clinchworthy."

"You won't see them to-night, though. They are gone to London—left this morning—for a few days' change, and to attend a great missionary meeting, at which Mr. Clinchworthy is to move a resolution, I believe. However, that is no reason why you should not come. I dare say somebody will be very glad to see you," quoth Polly, smiling significantly.

"All right, I'll come; but now I must go. I am wanted at the shop."

Whereupon Jack made his adieux to the ladies, and took his departure.

About the time that this conversation took place, Mr. and Mrs. Clinchworthy were at Rugby, where something happened closely affecting their interests, though they were in blissful ignorance of the fact.

When their train stopped for the usual five minutes, they rushed into the refreshment room,—which was already crowded with passengers, who had just arrived from other quarters,—made for the counter, and called for coffee.

Close to Mrs. Clinchworthy, yet in the hurry and bustle unobserved by her, was a man with iron-gray hair and silver-rimmed spectacles, leisurely consuming a bottle of Bass.

The coffee had hardly been served when the bell rang.

"Make haste, Mrs. Clinchworthy, or the train will be

starting without us," said a Whitebrook friend, who was going with them to the missionary meeting.

The man with the silver-rimmed spectacles whipped round, looked hard at Mr. and Mrs. Clinchworthy as they gulped down their coffee, then followed them to the door of the refreshment room, and saw them take their places in the London express.

"Jim Clinchworthy and Susan, by Heaven!" he said to himself. "Well off, too; they are traveling first-class. It must have been her I saw in Otsford's shop, and that young fellow I spoke to is her son; they are as like as two peas. Jim has stepped into my shoes. Is it a case of bigamy, or—— No, Susan wouldn't do the other thing, she's too good. I suppose he persuaded her I had hopped the twig. I must see to this."

"Where's that train from?" he asked a porter, as it steamed out of the station.

"Manchester, sir," answered the porter.

"So! That's where I must look for them," thought Paul Armstrong. "I wonder where I can find a Manchester directory. I took Susan from Jim Clinchworthy once, and, by gad! I'll take her from him again—unless he has made a fortune, like our Matt, and chooses to make it worth my while to leave him in possession."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"A QUEER do, this," said Matthew Armstrong, when he received Mr. Yates' invitation. "Nathan and me hasn't spoken sin' I sold him that bit o' land, and yet he axes us to a ball! Well, I bear no malice, and if he's willing to let bygones be bygones it would ill become us to hold back. We'll all go, every one of us—'Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong and family.' It would nayther be jannock nor Christianlike to do owt else."

"Not me. I am not going to begin going to balls and mixing wi' quality at my time o' life," said Mrs. Armstrong decisively. "Besides, I don't think as we should get back home afore ten or eleven."

"Well, seeing as th' show doesn't begin till nine, I dare say we shouldn't. However, please thysel'. I shall go and so will t' others. Thou can stop at home and mind th' house."

"I suppose you know that you will have to go in evening clothes, father?" put in Nancy.

"Ay, do I. A black suit and a holiday shirt. I'll get measured to-morrow. They'll come in th' next time I'm axed to a buryin'."

A few days later Luke came home. He had got a place at Sheffield, whither, when he had been there some three months, his mother and sister went to see him, and found that he was doing well and keeping steady. After a second visit with a similar result, and a good account of Luke from his employers, Matthew was persuaded

by his wife and daughter, against his better judgment, to let the prodigal return, as he was very penitent, and protested that he would never touch drink again.

"Very well, have your way," said the father. "He may come home, but I shall neither cancel th' codicil nor make him equal wi' Mark and Jack till he has been teetotal at least a year. Six months is nowt, and I'm feared as he'll break out again."

"He says he'll be content wi' a pound a week for spending brass and clothes, and not look for more till you like to give it him. He cannot go far wrong wi' that," observed Mrs. Armstrong.

"That depends. He may run into debt, and there 'll be more temptation for him in Whitebrook than there was in Sheffield. However, we shall see. It's a queer world; everything seems to be happening at once. Nathan Yates is giving a grand ball. Our Luke's coming back; Mark is to be wed next month, and our Jack's courting Kate Clinchworthy. But it 'll be time to talk about them being wed this time next year; and her father is to be th' next Mayor o' Whitebrook."

"Is that sure, or is't only talk?" asked Mrs. Armstrong.

"Sure! and what's more, there 'll be no opposition. Jimmy will be rarely proud. He made little on it when I spoke to him th' other day, but anybody could see as he wor as pleased as Punch. He likes being a big pot, Jimmy does."

"Pride goes before a fall, and pots sometimes gets broken," observed Mrs. Armstrong sententiously.

"That's true, but I hope nowt o' th' sort will happen to Jimmy. He's a rare good sort at th' bottom, though he does like hearing hissel talk." And Matthew thought

of the Damocles sword which hung over his friend's head and what a confoundedly awkward thing it would be if that dratted brother of his should turn up at Whitebrook before Clinchworthy's year of mayoralty came to an end.

On the evening of the meeting in the park Jack Armstrong, acting on Miss Perkins' hint, went to Brookfield House, and feeling sure that she would not "spoil sport," counted on a long and delightful *tête-à-tête* with Kate. But he counted without his host, or rather without his brewer, for the lovers had not been left to themselves five minutes when their billing and cooing was interrupted by a ring at the front door, and the next moment the drawing room door opened and a maid announced Mr. Yates.

The fact was that by dint of much thinking about the lady of his choice, Nathan had begun to fancy himself in love, and having heard that Mr. and Mrs. Clinchworthy and their daugther were gone to London, had called to ask Miss Perkins to give the answer which he desired, and she had all but promised, and let him make the engagement known to their friends.

He entered the drawing room smiling, but on beholding Kate and Jack—sitting a long way from each other—his face darkened with disappointment, and he said abruptly:

"Good-evening, Miss Clinchworthy! I thought you were gone—I mean I thought I would just look in and talk to you and Miss Perkins about the decoration of the ballroom; the men will finish laying the floor to-morrow."

"I will send for Miss Perkins," said Kate, and then seeing that Nathan had taken no notice of Jack, she added, "Don't you know Mr. John Armstrong, Mr. Yates?"

"By sight, but I don't think we have ever met before."

And then they shook hands, each mentally anathematizing the other, for Jack's sport was spoiled, and Nathan saw that he should not get the "word in private" with Miss Perkins he so much desired.

When Polly appeared, she took in the situation at a glance and was both amused and pleased, amused at the gentlemen's discomfiture, and pleased because she neither wanted to give her answer just then, nor offend her admirer by withholding it. They talked about the decoration of the ballroom and other things equally trivial for fully three hours, each of the visitors hoping the other would go, and so give him a chance of saying a last word to his lady-love. But neither of them budged till the clock struck eleven, when, it being evident that they could not stop longer, both rose together and went out together. Mr. Yates' brougham had been waiting for him since ten o'clock, but though he was going Jack's way, he did not offer him a lift, and they parted with curt "Good-nights!"

"Hang it all, I am always getting baulked by those confounded Armstrongs," thought Nathan, as he drove away.

Jack, on his part, had concluded that the brewer did not go to Brookfield House merely to talk about the forthcoming ball. As he could not have called to see Mr. and Mrs. Clinchworthy, who were away, nor Kate, who was "otherwise engaged," he must have called to see Polly, and being aware of her resolve to marry none but a man who could make handsome settlements, and recalling the enigmatic remarks she had made a few hours previously, Jack felt sure there was something in the wind, and that if they were not engaged they soon would be.

But he kept this opinion to himself, the Clinchworthys

suspected nothing, and until the night of the ball Miss Perkins made no sign, nor in the meantime had Mr. Yates made another call.

When the two young ladies inspected and criticized each others' costumes in Kate's room, she observed that Polly wore not a single article of jewelry, and thought the governess had done wisely, the few trinkets she possessed being of too ordinary a quality either to excite admiration or enhance her charms.

After the inspection Polly returned to her own room, and presently appeared downstairs, gloved, hooded, and cloaked for the drive to Heatherley Hall, whither Mrs. Clinchworthy, in her character as hostess, had already preceded them.

On alighting from their carriage they went into the dressing room to take off their wraps, and when Polly took off hers, and doffed her gloves, she displayed a treasure of gems which nearly took Kate's breath away—a diamond necklace, a pair of exquisitely wrought bracelets, a brooch alight with brilliants, while in her hair was twisted a rope of lustrous pearls, and on the third finger of her left hand gleamed a ring that alone must have cost a small fortune.

It was Polly's way of proclaiming her engagement, and intimating her acceptance of Mr. Yates' offer.

Early in the morning she had received from him a packet containing the jewelry and a *billet doux*, more brewer-like than lover-like, which ran thus:

"DEAREST MISS PERKINS:

"If you mean business wear these to-morrow night.

"Your devoted

"NATHAN."

But the splendor of the present more than atoned for the curtness of the note. Polly doted on beautiful gems, probably because she had never possessed any, and as she feasted her eyes on her *gages d'amour*, felt positively in love with the donor. She could have hugged him. Her last lingering scruples vanished. Nathan had found his way to Polly's heart.

Kate was too much surprised to say anything, and as other ladies were present, questions and congratulations were alike out of the question.

Polly's appearance in the drawing room created a sensation. The ladies put their heads together, and talked *sotto voce*, the hostess stared in speechless surprise, and Nathan, smiling triumphantly, whispered in her ear:

"We are engaged; them's my presents."

Then he shook hands with his *fiancée*, and asked her to put his name down for the first dance.

Shortly afterward the Armstrongs were announced,—every one of them,—Mrs. Armstrong's curiosity to see the inside of Heatherley Hall having got the better of her reluctance to mix with quality.

"Belial and all his brood, confound 'em!" soliloquized Nathan. "However, its all in the night's work, and its not every day as a chap gets engaged and gives a ball."

When Jack had secured Kate for as many dances as she would give him he asked Polly to put his name down for a polka, and the favor was graciously granted.

"May I congratulate you?" said he, glancing at her gems.

"If you please," said she, smiling archly.

"I do please. When a lady has gained a great prize in the lottery of life she has a right to be congratulated."

"Don't be sarcastic, Jack."

"I am not sarcastic, I am sincere. I remember your saying at Ashcombe what a store you set by money,—and no wonder, considering how you suffered in your childhood,—and that the man you married must be able to make handsome settlements. Well, you have got him, and he seems to have begun already."

"You are sarcastic. He would have me wear them to-night, and he is really very good. We are still good friends, Jack?"

"Certainly, and so far as it depends on me shall remain friends."

"People are sure to say nasty things. When they do, in your hearing, you will say a good word for me, won't you?"

"I should do that in any case, and I am still your debtor. Your engagement to Mr. Yates is entirely your own affair and his, and I sincerely hope you will be happy with him."

"Thank you, Jack, you are very kind. If I lost the only old friend I have in Whitebrook I should not be happy."

After the proceedings began, Jack was so much occupied in dancing with one and another, and sitting out dances with Kate, that he quite forgot to keep an eye on Luke, as his father—who went home early—had requested him. Moreover, as Luke did not dance, and had disappeared from the ballroom, it was an injunction not easily observed. About midnight, Frank Clinchworthy drew Jack aside.

"Come to the billiard room quickly," quoth he. "Luke is drinking like a fish, and unless something is done there will be further trouble."

Jack did not hesitate a moment.

"It must be done at once," said he. "I would rather give a hundred pounds than that Luke should disgrace himself and us—in this house above all others. Come along."

Nathan Yates had invited those of his guests who did not care for dancing to amuse themselves in the billiard room, and directed that they should be supplied with whatever they wanted, and Luke, finding himself among several of his old companions, and being pressed to drink, had succumbed to the temptation.

Jack found him stupidly drunk, and disposed to be quarrelsome.

"You must come with us," said his brother, taking him by the arm, to which Luke answered that he would see Jack at the devil first, whereupon Jack told him, in a fierce whisper, that if he made any bother he would fetch a policeman, and have him turned out of the house.

The threat succeeded.

"I'll go by mysel'," he muttered sulkily, and offered no further resistance.

The question was what to do with him. To take him out through the house was to expose his condition to all whom they met. They might even encounter Nathan Yates.

"Cannot we put him somewhere till he has sobered a bit, and smuggle him out when most of the guests are gone?" suggested Frank. "There's a place we passed down the passage, a sort of lumber room."

"Just the thing. An excellent idea," assented Jack, and with that they led Luke away.

The room contained rolls of carpet, oil cloth, druggets, an old sofa, and other odds and ends.

"There, lie down on that sofa, and sleep yourself sober," said Jack.

Luke, who kept his equilibrium with difficulty, threw himself on the sofa, and sank on the instant into a heavy sleep.

Jack locked the door and put the key in his pocket, remarking that by the time the party broke up Luke would be fit to be taken home.

But when he and Frank Clinchworthy returned for that purpose shortly before 4 A. M., the window was open, and the bird had flown.

"He has gone home," said Frank.

"The best thing he could do; got away quietly without being observed; he could not have been as drunk as he looked," returned Jack, and so sure was he of the correctness of his induction that he went straight home to bed without taking the trouble to look into Luke's room.

Meanwhile the delinquent was having a strange and vaired experience. Instead of being in bed, as Jack supposed, he was rambling at large, unconscious of what he did, and whither he was wending.

When he came to himself he was sitting under a hedge by a roadside. On the other side of the way was a house—as well as Luke could make out in the dim light of the dawning day, a public-house.

At first he thought he was dreaming, but the stiffness of his joints as he rose to his feet, the sickness of his stomach, and the cold in his bones speedily convinced him that he was in no imaginary world. He looked up the road and down the road, then walked across it, and closely examined the silent house.

"The Red Cat, as sure as I am a sinner! Seven

miles from Whitebrook," he murmured. "How the deuce did I get here?"

The last thing he remembered was being led by Frank Clinchworthy and Jack from the billiard room to another room, and lying down on a sofa.

"I guess I walked in my sleep, and have only just wakened up," he continued, after a moment's thought. "And now I suppose I must walk back. There's nowt else for it, and as fast as I can. But what will they say at home? Broken teetotal, and made a bigger foo' o' mysel' than ever I did afore."

And with that Luke turned his face homeward, and stepped briskly out. He met two or three wayfarers, who stared at him with wondering eyes, as well they might—a bare-headed man in bemired evening clothes, looking neither to the right nor the left, and walking like a pedestrian bent on beating a record. After a while he came to another roadside inn, where there were signs of life, smoke curling from a chimney and an open shippon door.

Luke, peeping into the shippon, saw a lass milking a cow, and to attract her attention gave a loud "Ahem!"

Whereupon the lass looked up, screamed, and started so violently that she capsized, and rolled with her milk can and stool on the shippon floor.

"There's nowt to be alarmed about. I'm not a boggart," said Luke, as he helped her up.

"I didn't take you for a boggart, I took you for a murderer, and you look like one now, wi' your bloody dickey and heyd. I never see owt so faa i' my life."

Luke, glancing at his shirt front, saw that it was discolored with port wine, and putting his hand to his head

found that he had knocked it against something and drawn blood.

"You welly flayed me to death, and I have shed a quart o' good milk, to say nowt o' being mucked all o'er. Who are yo', and what wanten yo'?" asked the lass.

"I want to see th' landlord—Bowler isn't his name?"

"That's my name! What wanten you wi' me?" said a voice at the shippon door.

"A bite and a sup, and I want you either to sell or lend me a coat and a hat," answered Luke, facing the owner of the voice, a big fellow with a bibulous face.

"Why, what are you doing here 'thout hat, and i' them clothes at this time o' day? I hope you haven't been in no lumber. If you have you'd better get out o' th' gate, for I don't harbor such like, and you've made Bet sheed her milk, and that's fourpence clean gone."

Seeing that frankness was the condition of getting what he wanted, Luke drew Mr. Bowler aside.

"To tell th' honest truth," he said, "I was at a party last night, and got a drop too much, and fell asleep, and when I wakened up was at th' Red Cat, just as I am."

"Where do you come fro'?"

"Whitebrook."

"Bithmon, you must ha' been rarely drunk, mester. I wish I'd ha' been wi' you. I have known th' same thing happen to mony a one. I knew a chap as set off home blind drunk, and when he came to hisself was lying in a stye. He thowt at th' fost as his wife had been turned into a soo and his childer into little pigs. But he soon found different. What may be your name, mester?"

"Armstrong."

"Armstrong! I reckon you'll be one o' them Belials. But come into th' house and have some hot ale and

rum, it 'll set you up; and I'll try to find you a coat and hat."

Luke pocketed the insult and followed the landlord. But having just then no stomach for strong drink, he asked for milk and oaten cake, greatly to Mr. Bowler's surprise, who, however, gave him what he wanted, and presently produced a coat and hat.

The former, a shabby long-tailed affair, had, as he explained, belonged to a cattle drover, who, being unable to pay his shot, had left the garment in lieu of cash. The hat was like an accordion. Mr. Armstrong might have both for a sovereign, which, though treble their value, Luke gladly paid. They would make an effectual disguise, and he was very anxious to disguise himself.

"And I'll tell you what," added the landlord: "Betty will be setting off with th' milk kits in a twothry minutes, and if you like to ride with her in th' shandry as far as Whitebrook you're welcome. They're yoking owd Smiler up now."

With this offer Luke also closed, and after obtaining a promise from Bowler that he would keep a still tongue about his escapade, mounted the milk cart, where Betty was already seated. At the outset she eyed him askance, but by a judicious admixture of money and fine words he induced her to make old Smiler put his best leg foremost, and she set him down within a five minutes' walk of Pye Nest, though it was rather out of her way.

Luke's plan was to steal into the house and his own room unseen, and as most of the inmates were pretty sure to be asleep he was hopeful of success. But he forgot that though his father might go late to bed he was never late to rise; and as Luke turned a corner of the house on his way to the back door, they met face to face.

"Why—how—what the deuce!" exclaimed Matthew, who thought Luke was in bed. "I never! Where did thou get that coat and hat? If it was Easter time I should say as thou had been a peace-egging. I'd hire mysel' out as a crow-boggart if I were thee. There isn't a bird in th' country side as would come near thee. Where has thou been? But I need not ask,"—scanning Luke's inflamed face and bloodshot eyes,—"thou has been drunk, and put them things on so as nobody would know thee. Thou had that much sense."

Luke hung his head. What could he say? Only that Poppleton and Tomlinson, and two or three others, put port and champagne under his nose, and tempted him to drink; but he would do so no more—never so help him——

"Do so no more," repeated his father scornfully. "I think I've heard thee say that afore. I'd jowl my head agen a wall afore I'd let such fools as Poppleton and Tomlinson persuade me to do owt as I knew were wrong. Well, there is only one thing for it, thou mun go back to th' water cure and finish thy term. I'm to blame for letting thee come back. But it was all along of thy mother and Nancy, drat 'em!"

"Nay, father——"

"Not a word. If thou doesn't do as I bid thee, and soon too, that codicil shall stand forever, and thou shall never enter th' shop again."

And with that Matthew walked off in high dudgeon and Luke slunk, chapfallen, into the house.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHITEBROOK folk said that courting had made Nathan Yates a young man, both in appearance and years. He dressed more smartly, walked more briskly, held his head higher than he had ever done before. As for his age, he would not admit to being more than forty-six, albeit those in the secret knew that he turned eight-and-forty a few days before the ball. In the letter to her uncle apprising him of her engagement, Polly put even a finer point on it; Mr. Yates, she said, was a little over forty. It looked better than "a little under fifty," and was only a shade less accurate.

Whitebrook folk also observed, and made a joke of it, that the brewer "courted strong." He went to Brookfield House nearly every night. The truth was that now the plunge was taken Polly laid herself out to fascinate her middle-aged lover, and by teasing, caressing, and flattering him in turn, succeeded in winning all the heart which assiduous devotion to money-making had left at his disposal. Then there was the pride of possession. Polly belonged to him—a good-looking, lively, and clever lass, "fit to grace any station in life." Mr. Yates protested that for cleverness there was not her "marrow" in all Lancashire. And if she had no fortune, what by it? He had enough for both.

Nathan's strong courting was sometimes rather awkward for Kate and Jack, and not always pleasant for the Clinchworthys. When, as occasionally happened, the

wooers clashed, the family were excluded from both the drawing room and the breakfast room, the former being assigned to Mr. Yates and Miss Perkins, while Kate and Jack were relegated to the more humble apartment, an arrangement to which Kate and Kate's mother demurred. It did not seem fair that the daughter of the house should play second fiddle to the governess. But the master of the house would have it so, and, as he pointed out to his wife, it was between making Kate play second fiddle to Polly and Nathan Yates playing second fiddle to Jack Armstrong, which latter was not to be thought of, Nathan being not only the richest man in Whitebrook but many years Jack's senior.

The argument seemed unanswerable, yet though silenced Mrs. Clinchworthy seemed unconvinced. On the other hand, Polly was behaving very well and showing a due sense of gratitude to her benefactress. She continued teaching Clara and May as though nothing had happened, and said she should do so up to within a week of her marriage, which was to take place in December. Also, she told Nathan he must give Mrs. Clinchworthy a handsome present, to which he made answer that he would do whatever she desired. The unromantic, hard-headed brewer was growing effusive and sentimental, and could refuse his darling Polly nothing.

Said Kate one day, when she, her mother, and Jack were talking matters over: "I should not like to marry Mr. Yates."

"You won't have the chance, dear, he is going to marry somebody else," said Jack.

"Don't be absurd. You know what I mean. I would not marry Mr. Yates even though he asked me and I did

not like somebody else better. She is only marrying him for his money."

"Perhaps; and it is wrong to marry for money. All the same there are extenuating circmustances. I have tried to put myself in Polly's place, and I am afraid that if I were a tutor or a clerk earning two pounds a week, and without much hope of doing better, and was heart whole and had a chance of marrying a woman a few years my senior, with forty or fifty thousand a year, I should be sorely tempted."

"But you would not, Jack. I am sure you would not be so wicked as to marry a woman you did not love. I know I would rather be a governess, or a weaver, or a winder, all my life than marry a man I did not care for."

"You are assuming that Polly does not care for Nathan Yates."

"How can she?" asked Mrs. Clinchworthy. "He is twice her age, and they have not an idea in common, unless it be the love of money. Would she have him, do you think, if he were a greengrocer or a tailor?"

"I am sure she wouldn't," returned Jack, laughing. "And I am not defending mercenary marriages. But Polly is not a bad sort, and I dare say she will make a good wife."

"We shall see," said Mrs. Clinchworthy dubiously. "For my part I am rather afraid that her sudden elevation and the handling of a large income will deteriorate her character. Kate is quite right: it is better to marry a poor man for himself than a rich man for his money. Money does not necessarily bring happiness. I was never happier than when her dear father was a hand-mule spinner and wrought at the factory, while I was rocking

the cradle with my foot and working with my needle to add to his scanty earnings. And the joy when he was made an overlooker! And though we have got on, and have a great deal to be thankful for, I don't think I am happier now."

If Mrs. Clinchworthy had spoken all that was in her mind she would have said that she was less happy, for in those early days there was no Paul Armstrong in the dim background of her thoughts, troubling her peace, and making her tremble for the future.

Jack had never been quite able to account for Mrs. Clinchworthy's devotion to her husband, whom he rated rather low and did not greatly respect, probably because his future father-in-law was pompous and patronizing, and, addicted to giving what he thought good advice, especially to his juniors. Still less was he able to understand his own father's regard for a man with whom he had so little in common, and for the opinion which he had several times heard him express that, despite his foibles, Jimmy was about the best chap he knew.

"He must possess qualities I have been unable to discover," was Jack's conclusion. "All the same, he is not worthy of being named in the same day as my old dad."

As Jack's "old dad" had foretold, Mr. Clinchworthy was elected Mayor of Whitebrook by the unanimous vote of the town council, and the *Whitebrook Mercury* celebrated the event by a laudatory biography of "Our New Chief Magistrate," mentioning among other things that he came from the same part of the county as "our worthy townsman, Mr. Matthew Armstrong," and pointing the moral of its tale by observing that with perseverance, integrity, and a few other virtues, no

man, however humbly born, need despair of making himself even as eminent, wealthy, and universally esteemed as the Mayor of Whitebrook.

Attention was drawn to the fact that albeit Mr. Clinchworthy was a sincere Nonconformist he was no bigot, and that he proposed to attend the parish church, in his official capacity, on the following Sunday, together with as many members of the corporation as might be pleased to favor him with their company.

When Matthew Armstrong saw the article he laughed and said it would be "nuts for Jimmy," but with Jimmy himself he took a different line, asking pointedly why he had let the article in question appear.

"I did not suggest it. The editor came to the counting house and asked for a few particulars, that was all," said Clinchworthy.

"Ay, but you could ha' stopped it. Things as gets into th' papers are read sometimes, I reckon."

"What do you mean, Matt?"

"I mean as it might be seen by somebody as you wouldn't like to see."

"Good Heavens! You surely don't think it possible——"

"Owt's possible. I know you don't like to hide your light under a bushel, but better that than have it put out altogether. However, no harm may come of it, though I have my fears. Let us hope so."

"Yes, let us hope so," exclaimed Mr. Clinchworthy fervently, whom the eventuality suggested by his friend had seriously disquieted.

Sunday came, and the mayor with most of the aldermen and councilors went to church, and took their places in the corporation pew. In another pew were

Mrs. Clinchworthy, her children, and several of their friends.

The church was well filled and belated worshipers had a difficulty in finding seats. One of the late comers had iron-gray hair and wore silver-rimmed spectacles.

Mrs. Clinchworthy enjoyed the church service and joined heartily in singing the "Venite," the more so as she was in a devout and thankful frame of mind, and the sacred song seemed to voice her thoughts. At its conclusion, and as the clergyman was giving out the Psalms, she chanced to look round, when her eye fell on a face she knew only too well, staring hard at hers.

The shock was so great, the revulsion of feeling so intense, that she almost fainted and was compelled to sit down. Kate gave her a smelling bottle, and Frank, who was always thoughtful for his mother, proposed to take her out, observing that the church was so crowded and the air so close that he did not think she could remain till service ended.

Mrs. Clinchworthy signified assent. She felt quite sure that she could not endure the strain until the service was over.

"I am better now," she said, when they were outside, "Give me your arm, dear; it will do me good to walk home."

She feared that if he went back he might see and recognize Paul Armstrong, and, what was worse, Paul might accost her son after the service and engage him in talk.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE stroke that felled Paul Armstrong proved to be a stroke of luck, or, as he sometimes profanely put it to himself, a blessing very much disguised. More correctly, the cause and precursor of a stroke of luck.

A passing policeman observing an inert body in the gutter, and assuming it to be that of a drunken man, administered several gentle kicks and opprobrious epithets by way of inducing him to rise. But as these produced no effect he summoned a couple of colleagues and sent for a stretcher, on which Paul was placed, and taken to the nearest police station, where a cursory examination showed that he had got a crack on the skull which was quite enough to account for his unconsciousness, and render necessary his immediate removal to a hospital.

"A serious case," pronounced the house surgeon. "Concussion of the brain beyond a doubt, probably also fracture of the skull; but that cannot be determined until the swelling has subsided—and a broken collar bone. How did it happen, and who is he?"

To neither question was an answer forthcoming. The police could not tell how it happened, and their examination of the contents of Paul's pockets had afforded no clew to his identity.

He remained unconscious for forty-eight hours, and on coming to himself felt so dazed that it was some time before he could remember what had befallen, or give

himself a name. After reflection, he decided for "Phineas Herring," the name by which he was known at his lodgings; occupation, commission agent, a term that includes many callings, and often cloaks a multitude of sins.

Asked about his broken head, he said that he had been struck down by somebody whom he did not see, for what reason or from what motive he could not tell. No more than this were the police able to get out of him.

The hospital, a small one, not very well managed, possessed no accident ward, and save when one of the patients chanced to be in a critical condition no night nurses were in attendance.

Paul occupied a bed at the end of the ward, and only after he had been there several days had he a near neighbor. The newcomer, an old man of the name of Tonks, seemed to be very ill, and as Paul gathered from the nurses and doctors, was suffering from a complication of disorders induced by innutrition; in other words semi-starvation, from which, and his shabby clothes and other signs, he naturally concluded that Tonks was very poor. Nevertheless, the old man seemed to dream of naught but money. Sometimes, when Paul wakened in the night, he would hear broken mutterings such as: "Two hundred pounds, three hundred pounds; sixty three and forty-four make a hundred and seven; a penny saved yesterday, and another penny to-day, that makes twopence; only three per cent. for post-office savings."

"The old bloke is either mad or a miser," thought Paul.

Presently something else happened. One night he saw Tonks take from under his pillow, and immediately

put back again, what looked like a bulky pocketbook. After this Paul watched him more closely than ever, and perceived that shortly before the attendants came to make his bed, Tonks would furtively withdraw the pocketbook from its hiding-place, and place it under his arm.

This settled the question. The old man was a miser, and Paul worked himself into a fever of curiosity as to what the pocketbook might contain—curiosity not unmixed with greed. Yet though Paul might have purloined it while the owner slept, he could neither effectively hide nor carry it away. The risk was too great, and the idea was no sooner conceived than abandoned.

Meanwhile Tonks worsened, and when Paul overheard the doctor ask one of the nurses whether the old man had any friends, he knew that the end was not far off. He did not catch the answer, but as nobody came to see him on visiting days, he concluded that Tonks was as friendless as he seemed to be poor.

The end came, as ends often do come, unexpectedly. Wakening one morning at daybreak, Paul, as he generally did, bade his neighbor—who slept lightly and awoke early—good-day, and inquired how he felt. Tonks neither answered nor stirred, whereupon Paul, slipping out of bed, peered into the old man's face and took his hand. The face was death-like, the hand cold and clammy. Shocked and scared by this discovery, Paul was turning away, when he bethought him of the pocketbook, and without more ado took it from under the pillow. It was stuffed with banknotes. These he appropriated, but caution prevailing over cupidity, he put three or four of them back, in order to disarm suspicion, thrust the others into a stocking, and the stocking into one of his boots,

then returned to bed, and made as though he were asleep.

Five minutes afterward one of the nurses appeared, and on going to Tonks' bed made an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Paul sleepily.

"The old man is dead," said the nurse. "I did not expect he would last long, but if I had thought he was in immediate danger I should have sat up with him. Have you any idea at what time he died?"

"Not the least," answered Paul. "Poor old man!"

When the body was removed the pocketbook was found.

"Why, the old hunks was rich. Here are four ten-pound notes!" exclaimed the nurse, "and some papers about money."

The papers about money showed that Tonks had deposits in divers banks, including the Post Office Savings Bank, probably on the principle of dividing the risks. What became of the old man's leavings Paul did not care to inquire, and never heard. On the following day he was pronounced convalescent and discharged. But until he was in the privacy of his own room, fear of being caught in the act restrained him from examining his spoil. It consisted of banknotes, mostly fives, tens, and twenties, many of ancient date, amounting in the whole to nearly thirteen hundred pounds. A good haul, and, as Paul persuaded himself, not dishonestly obtained, for, as the money belonged to nobody, he had as much right to it as anybody else. It was treasure trove, in fact.

But the ex-convict was too cute to put his treasure into a bank. Notes paid into a bank can be traced, and he might be asked how he came by them. But notes

changed or paid away on the turf are not traceable, betting men being too busy to take the numbers of the notes which pass through their hands.

Paul had now sufficient capital to set up as a bookie. To begin with he took a partner more knowing in turf matters than himself, and when they parted company Paul continued the business on his sole behalf, under the style of Armstrong & Company. Having self-restraint enough to refrain from backing horses, except on commission, and sense enough to keep himself respectable and settle promptly, he did not do badly, though not so well as he had hoped. His expenses were heavy, and when the favorite won his profits were nil.

The reader knows of Paul's meeting with his nephew Luke and how deftly he "picked the brains" of that misguided young man, also of the way in which he learned that his wife was posing as Mrs. Clinchworthy, and his resolution to turn the discovery to account.

The difficulty was to find out where they lived. The Manchester directory disclosed nothing to the purpose. Among the Clinchworthys who therein figured was only one James, described as a shoemaker. But as hand-mule spinners don't rise to affluence by shoemaking, and cobblers are not in the habit of traveling first-class, this could not be the James whom Paul sought, and, as he sagely reflected, a man may travel in a Manchester train without actually living at Manchester. Yet he probably lived in the county, and Paul resolved to make a point of overhauling every Lancashire directory he could lay his hands on.

But the malign fortune that so often favors evil designs saved him the trouble.

Shortly afterward, while journeying to Manchester,

where he had business in connection with the forthcoming November Handicap, and reading a morning paper, the name which so much occupied his thoughts caught his eye. It figured in a list of newly-elected mayors:

"Whitebrook, Alderman James Clinchworthy."

"The very man, I do believe!" mentally exclaimed Paul. "What is more likely than that Jim and Matt, who were always good friends, should settle in the same town?"

When he reached his headquarters in Cottonopolis, the Post Office Hotel, Paul asked the head waiter for a Whitebrook directory, also for a Whitebrook paper, if there was such a thing. Local papers often give notices of newly-elected mayors.

The head waiter brought him the directory and a copy of the *Whitebrook Mercury.*

Paul turned first to the former, and was not long in finding what he wanted.

"James Clinchworthy, J. P., cotton spinner and manufacturer. Residence, Brookfield House."

"A beak, by Jingo! Fancy Jimmy being a beak!" muttered Paul, then looked at the *Mercury* and read with avidity its account of "Our New Chief Magistrate."

The last vestige of doubt vanished. The Mayor of Whitebrook was the man he sought.

"A howling swell, and rich," thought Paul. "The respected chief of one of the largest concerns in the town. He'll stand bleeding, and he'll have to bleed, too, if he keeps Susan. Going to church on Sundays, eh? Well, I'll go too, and have a look at him and her, for I guess she'll be there."

CHAPTER XXXII.

SILENTLY, and with a pale face and a heavy heart, Mrs. Clinchworthy wended homeward from church. Her son vainly entreated her to let him call a cab.

"No, thank you, dear, the walk will do me good. I feel better already," she said, and relapsed into silence.

She wanted to think. The long-impending blow was about to fall. No mere chance had brought Paul Armstrong to Whitebrook—on that day above all others. His eyes, as they met hers, bespoke envy, hatred, and wicked exultation.

What shape would the blow take? Would Paul come to the house to see James, waylay him in the street, or at once bruit his tale about the town? Was his object hush money or revenge? And if hush money were given him, would he be trusted to keep a still tongue?

These and other unanswerable questions surged in her mind, darkening it with dire forebodings, and well-nigh driving her to despair.

But Susan Clinchworthy had too high a courage and too much sense to invite disaster by losing hope.

She bethought her that if James and herself had reason to dread exposure, so had Paul. His purpose was more likely to be gain than revenge; and if he were not wholly bad, his heart, when he knew what she might have to tell him, could hardly fail to be touched. In any event cer-

tainty, even with calamity, were more tolerable than suspense. Better face the peril boldly, and know the worst, than live in continued fear.

But for that day—his day of triumph—James should be spared. Until the morrow he should not know whom she had seen at church. Then he must know—forewarned is forearmed.

This conclusion and these thoughts diminished Susan's fears and raised her spirits, and Frank was pleased to observe that as they neared home his mother's brow cleared, and the color returned to her cheeks.

"You feel better?" he said.

"Much. I told you the walk would do me good," she answered cheerfully, and when her husband came home, and made anxious inquiries, Susan laughed pleasantly, saying that it was very stupid of her to feel faint, and that if she had had her smelling salts, there would have been no need for her to go out. The fresh air and the walk had set her to rights.

In the evening they had visitors. Nathan Yates, of course, for though Mr. Clinchworthy objected to Sunday courting, he could not deny his house to the wealthy brewer, and toleration of his wooing involved tolerating Jack Armstrong's, who on this occasion was accompanied by his father, not, as the latter jocularly observed, to help him with his sweethearting, but to have a talk with Jimmy.

Frank, who found himself in the way when the courters were to the fore, sought more congenial society elsewhere, and the old folk betook themselves to the dining rooms. They had not been there long when a servant brought a letter for Mrs. Clinchworthy. It had just been left by a man, who declined to wait for an answer.

After glancing at the address, Susan laid the letter on the table.

"Whom is it from?" asked her husband. "Better open it at once. Nobody would send a letter by hand on a Sunday except on pressing business."

Susan guessed, or rather knew, whom the missive was from, and seeing that concealment, even for another day, was neither possible nor desirable, did as James desired. The letter ran thus:

"DEAR SUSAN:

"It has come to my knowledge that you are living with James Clinchworthy. If you and he thought I was dead, or would never return, you are mistaken. I am alive and kicking, and mean to have my marital rights. I shall be glad to have a line from you, addressed to Mr. Phineas Herring, at the Three Pigeons, saying when and where we can meet. Our Matthew being such a big gun I thought he would not like it to be known in the town that he has a brother who is not quite as rich and respectable as him and Jimmy, so I have taken an alias—for this occasion only. With dear love,

"Your affectionate husband,

"PAUL ARMSTRONG.

"P.S.—If I don't hear from you by ten o'clock to-morrow morning, I shall call at Brookfield House and give my right name, also consult a lawyer."

When Susan raised her head both the men were regarding her anxiously, and obviously expecting her to speak.

"I have something to tell you, James," she said. "I did not mean to tell you till to-morrow. I wanted you

to have this day free from care. But now I must. I saw somebody at church."

"Paul!" exclaimed Matthew.

"How did you know?"

"Well, when I heard as you had nearly fainted in church I guessed summat was wrong, and that letter, and your face as you read it, told the rest. I'm right sorry. It couldn't have happened waur."

"It's a judgment," groaned Clinchworthy. "A judgment on my pride and worldliness. You were right, Matthew. I should not have let my name get into th' papers."

"That's done it, I do believe. However, I don't know why you should call it a judgment. Now as Paul has turned bookie, and is going about th' country constant, he was sure to light on somebody, sooner or later, as would let th' cat out o' th' bag. What does th' letter say, Susan?"

Susan read the letter aloud.

"What do you think is his object?" asked Clinchworthy.

"Brass. That's aw gammon about marital rights, and taking an alias out of consideration for me. As if I cared a button top what he caws hissel! He knows as if he gave his right name i' Whitebrook he'd be giving away a secret as he wants paying to keep."

"I shall have to buy his silence."

"I reckon you will, unless he opens his mouth too wide. But if it wor me I'd set him at defiance, and take th' consequences."

"That is impossible now. Think of my position in the town and the frightful scandal it would cause. I should have to resign."

"Well, there are waur things than resigning a job as brings nowt in. However, it is for you to say. Only, bear in mind that paying Paul won't get you shut of him. Whatever he may say or swear, he'll be down on you constant for a fresh sub., and the more you give him the more you'll be in his power. You talk about a scandal! What like of a scandal would it be, think you, if it came out as the Mayor of Whitebrook had been bribing a returned transport to let him live with his wife."

Clinchworthy sprang from his chair as though he had been stung.

"My God, I never thought of that before!" he cried wildly. "It would be too terrible. It must not be. But what shall we do? Is there no way?"

"There is, though I don't much like it. However, you cannot fight a chap like Paul with the gloves on. Say as he is not Paul Armstrong. It is only what he has said hissel. He's gan his name at th' Three Pigeons as Phineas Herring, and he cannot be both. I don't think as there is anybody at Barrow as could tell him. I doubt whether I could tell him myself."

"I think you could, Matthew," interposed Mrs. Clinchworthy. "He has greatly altered, but it is the same face. Without telling an untruth I could not deny that he is the man, and I am sure none of us would like to do anything which might involve telling lies, and perhaps perjuring ourselves. My opinion is that we should see Paul, and after hearing what he has to propose, consider what is the best to be done. We need not say either 'yes' or 'no' on the instant."

"You are quite right, Susan. We will see this son of Belial,—no offense to you, Matthew,—and, please God, a way may yet be opened, though for the moment it is

hidden from us," said the mayor, who had recovered his composure. "But where shall we see him? Not here. Frank knows him."

"Nor at my house. Jack knows him," added Matthew.

"I have it," quoth Clinchworthy, after a moment's musing. "We will see Paul in my room at the town-hall. As all sorts of people, disreputable and otherwise, seek interviews with me in my official capacity, his appearance will excite no curiosity. You two must be with me when he comes—say at 5 o'clock P. M. I shall write to him to that effect."

Whereupon Mr. Clinchworthy took a pen and wrote as follows:

"SIR:

"My wife has handed me the letter which you have thought fit to address to her. If you can make it convenient to come to the townhall to-morrow afternoon, at five o'clock, I shall be ready to give you a hearing. On mentioning your name to the porter you will be admitted to my room.

"Yours truly,

"JAMES CLINCHWORTHY."

"Just the thing," said Matthew, when he had heard the note read. "I'd give summat if I could write like you, Jimmy. Fasten it up and I'll pop it into a letter-box as I go home. Better not let th' servants know as you've a correspondent at th' Three Pigeons."

The letter reached Paul on the following morning, and, though more curt than courteous, it pleased him. He had not expected Jimmy to come to the Three

Pigeons, or Susan to ask him to dinner. But the missive seemed to mean business, and he thought it would suit his purpose better to have a private interview with Clinchworthy at the townhall than to see them both at Brookfield House. Indeed, he preferred not to meet Susan. She was a good sort, and he had an uneasy sense of having used her ill. He had persuaded her to marry him under promises of amendment, which he had failed to keep—had not even meant to keep. Her mere presence would be a reproach, and might weaken his resolve.

"It must have been deuced hard lines for the lass after I was lagged," he thought. "No wonder she took up with Jimmy, and though I never liked him, and he was always a psalm-singing sneak, he has done well by her."

And then Paul's remnant of a conscience whispered that by coming to Whitebrook, and demanding, in effect if not in words, hush money under a threat of exposure, he was using Susan even worse than he had used her before, and that the best thing he could do was to clear out of the place and return no more.

If his cupidity had not been excited by exaggerated accounts of the new mayor's wealth from mine host of the Three Pigeons, and the sight of James Clinchworthy's fine house and huge factory, which he viewed in the course of the day, Paul might conceivably have obeyed this better impulse.

"Jimmy has more money than he knows what to do with," he reflected. "He'll never miss a few thousands, and Susan will be none the worse after she has got over her scare."

Having thus appeased his conscience, he considered whether he should demand a sum down, or an annuity,

and on the principle of a bird in the hand being worth two in the bush, decided for the sum down, a good round sum.

At 5 P. M. "sharp," Paul presented himself at the townhall, and on giving his alias to the porter was ushered into the mayor's room.

But instead of the mayor being alone, there were with him two other persons, whose company he would gladly have been spared. Susan, and a stout, full-faced, gray-haired man, whom he guessed, rather than knew, to be his brother Matthew.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Herring?" said the mayor politely, pointing to a chair.

Ruffled by Clinchworthy's manner, and the frigid silence observed by Susan and Matthew, Paul sat down with an ill grace and an embarrassed air.

"My wife received this note from you last night, Mr. Herring," added the mayor, as he produced the letter. "Might I inquire what it means?"

"My name is not Herring—it is Armstrong."

"That remains to be proved. I only give you the name you have given yourself. However, for the purpose of argument, I will admit that you are Paul Armstrong. I ask again, what does this letter mean?"

"Stop that jaw, Jimmy. Don't try to come the beak over me. I am neither a prisoner nor a witness," exclaimed Paul roughly. "You well know what I mean. My wife is living with you and I want her to come and live with me."

"Suppose she refuses?"

"I shall force her."

"How?"

"By going to law."

"You mean you would bring an action for the restitution of conjugal rights. Do you really think, Mr. Herring,—I beg your pardon, Mr. Paul Armstrong,—that, on being possessed of the facts, viz., that twenty-four years ago you were convicted of murder and sentenced to transportation for life; that since that time you have neither written her a line nor contributed a penny to her support; that she married me, believing you were dead, any court in England would order her to resume cohabitation with you, under pain of imprisonment for contempt. And I think she would prefer the imprisonment."

Paul's face reddened with anger. This was not the way in which he had expected that his overtures would be received. But he put a restraint on himself and answered, with only a slight show of irritation:

"You may be right in your law. I dare say you are, being a beak, but if I cannot get my rights, I can publish my wrongs. I am an outcast; exposure don't hurt me. For you and Susan it would be social ruin, as you well know. However, I don't bear malice, and if you will make it worth my while I'll make no more bother, and keep a still tongue."

"You propose, then, that I should purchase your silence?"

"Ay, if you want it."

"And what is your price, may I ask?"

"Twenty thousand pounds. Susan is worth more than that to you."

It was perhaps well for Clinchworthy's newly formed resolution to face the worst that Paul named so high a figure. Had he demanded a thousand pounds James would have been sorely tempted to close with the offer, even though it should secure him only a short respite.

"That is ridiculous. You might as well ask a hundred thousand," he said firmly. "And allow me to remind you that it is not a question of buying Susan; it is a question of buying your silence, and I have no guarantee that I shall get value for my money."

"A thousand a year, paid quarterly, then. That will be a sufficient guarantee, for you would only go on paying as long as I kept faith."

"That is equally out of the question."

"Ten thousand down, then."

"No."

"Four thousand, and I'll undertake to leave England within a week of receiving the money, and that is the least I'll take, so help me God!"

"Nor four thousand."

Paul rose from his chair.

"All right, you must take the consequences, then," he said savagely. "To-night I'll tell the company at the Three Pigeons that the Mayor of Whitebrook has committed bigamy, and is living in adultery with my wife. To-morrow I'll instruct a lawyer to sue for a divorce. I can do that, any way."

"Wait a moment, Paul," said Susan, as he made toward the door. "I have something to tell you."

Paul turned round, and Susan, standing up, looked him full in the face.

"You have led an evil life, Paul, but I cannot think you are wholly bad," she went on. "Your mother was a good woman, and I remember you once telling me how bitterly you regretted having been a bad son. Well, I am going to appeal to you in her name, and as the mother of your child."

"My child! What do you mean, Susan, are you mad?"

"Soon after you were taken away by the police," continued Susan, heedless of the interruption, "I knew that I was likely to become a mother, the mother of a convict's child. When we heard you were dead, and James asked me to marry him, I was in sore distress, both of body and mind, not knowing how to provide for myself and my poor unborn babe. I told James everything, yet he held to his offer. His love for me was so great, he said, that he would take me just as I was. Well, we married, and when the child came into the world James was a true father to it. Never has he made the least difference between Frank and his own children. He has brought him up tenderly, educated him expensively, and made a will in which he has left him equal with the others. And this is the man whom you threaten with social ruin!"

"My child! Jim Clinchworthy has been a father to my child, you say?" gasped Paul, looking inquiringly at his brother.

"It is quite true; I've known it all along," responded Matthew. "And it is because of that, as I have always said Jimmy was about the best chap I knew. I could not have done it, and I don't know anybody else as could."

"You have seen the lad yourself," said Susan.

"Me? When and where?"

"In Otsford & Bullivant's shop."

"What! that young fellow as is so like you? Him as took you out of church yesterday?"

"Yes. Frank has always been good to his mother. Heaven help him when he knows who his father is! For if you carry out your threat all will come out. If folk are to know the worst about James, they shall also know

the best. True, it will blast Frank's prospects and spoil his life; but I will not shield your son and mine to the detriment of him who has acted so noble a part—my husband and my love."

Susan laid one of her hands on James' shoulder, and with the other took his hand.

"Jim Clinchworthy has brought up my lad, and made a gentleman of him, and he does not know I am his father!" said Paul, in a voice hoarse with emotion. "Keep it from him. Keep it from him. Never tell him. Susan is right, I have led an evil life. I don't lead a good one now. But I'm not that bad as to ruin my own lad and the man who has been to him what I should have been myself. Have no fear, I'll go away and keep your secret, and you shall never see me or hear of me again. I'll do the right thing for once. You are a good man, James Clinchworthy. Will you shake hands with a rank bad 'un before he quits your sight forever, and forgive him, if you can, for the ill he has meditated against you?"

"Freely, as I hope myself to be forgiven," answered Clinchworthy, taking Paul's hand.

"And you, Susan?"

"I answer as James answered, and may God forgive you, and help you to lead a better life," said Susan, whose joy over her deliverance was tempered with a deep sense of pity for the outcast.

"If there's owt I can do for thee, speak," said Matthew, who was almost in tears. "Would a thousand pounds be of any use to thee where thou art going, as a gift from me?"

"Thank thee kindly, Matt, but I don't mean to take any more money as I have not honestly earned. I have

heard of him again.

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